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THE ELF-ERRANT







THE ELF-ERRANT BY
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BY W. E. F. BRITTEN

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THE ELF-ERRANT

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CHAPTER I.

GREEN AND RED.

HE came over to Ireland between the leaves of a Shakspeare, and to this day nobody knows whether his coming was a mistake or not. The place, however, was in "The Tempest," just at Ariel's song—

Where the bee sucks, there suck I.

It was a very good place, and he felt quite comfortable. In any other book he might have been crushed; but Shakspeare never crushes any living thing, and besides, he has a peculiar tenderness for little elves.

No sooner was this Elf set free, than he flew straight out at the window; for he had a passion for the open air, and a prejudice against staying too long in one

place. He certainly had a good many prejudices for so small a creature. The result of this one was that he flew straight into a shower of rain which happened to be falling; and that annoyed him. It was not that he minded being wet, exactly; he had been wet before now, and he was such a sturdy Elf that it took a good deal to hurt him. But he was annoyed, all the same, and he sought for the nearest shelter that might be found.

This proved to be a dull green dockin, which grew on the top of a garden wall. The Elf crept under one of its drooping lower leaves and leaned against its stem to wait. On the other side of the dockin, another little Elf was sitting dreamily, his arms folded, observing the weather. And this is how an English Elf met an Irish Elf for the very first time.

The two looked at each other and nodded their heads, like flowers. Then the English Elf said—

“Rose Red.”

And the Irish Elf said—

“Trefoil.”

They were not imparting any particular information; they were only mentioning their names to each other.

“And what way do I see you now?” Trefoil added politely.

Rose Red should have answered, of course, "Faith, just the way that I am!"

But he had not been long enough in the country to know this form of greeting. So he stared a little and asked—

"What do you think of the weather?" just as he would have done at home.

Trefoil put his head out from under his dockin leaf and took an observation. The long lines of slanting, silver rain came down steadily. They beat on the lavenders and lilies in the garden; they hummed on the wet grass behind the garden wall. He drew his head in again, and remarked contentedly—

"Well, I'm thinking it's just beginning to be no better."

He was a thoroughly amiable fairy this Trefoil, but information was not his strong point.

"It always rains in Ireland, I've been told," said the other. "You must find it wretched."

"Not at all," said Trefoil. "Moist and agreeable—that's the Irish notion both for climate and for company. You'll like it when you're used to it. Does it ever rain where you come from?"

Now the English Elf was nothing if not truthful.

"Sometimes," he replied, and shuffled a little on his feet.

He was not feeling in the least at home under this dockin, because in the leaf which *ought* to have sheltered him there was a hole, and the drip outside came through it down on his head. At last he mentioned the fact to Trefoil, who jumped up in a great hurry, and insisted on changing places with him, regretting deeply that he had not observed it before.

"I don't know what brought us here at all," he declared. "Sure, there's no fit shelter for a fairy of any size on this old wall. A friend of my own, a snail that lives in a crack under the north side of us this minute, told me he would have left long ago, only he never did anything in a hurry. I'm curious to see if he's there still. He may have got overtaken by a blackbird, of course, or been crushed by something accidental near the young salad bed. But one thing I'm sure of—he hasn't broken his neck!"

Rose Red was not listening. He was sitting dejectedly in the place lately occupied by Trefoil, and in the leaf over his head there were *two* holes, now, dripping like anything. But he was too polite to mention them again.

"I suppose all the leaves in this country are ragged," he said to himself. "Nice prospect, in a climate where it's always raining! They ought to do something about

it. But if all the fairies are like this Trefoil, they don't know whether they are wet or dry. He was sitting under this water-spout a minute ago, and he didn't even notice it. My wings!"

Just at that moment a blackbird close by opened his golden bill, and sang—

“ Pipe up, pipe
For the sun—the sun—the sun.
Cheer him up, cheer him up!
Chir-o-wee . . . ”

There was no rhyme in the song, but it really sounded very well just as the blackbird sang it. However, after a minute, he added—

“ Pretty sweet, pretty sweet? ”

in a dissatisfied sort of way to some one out of sight, who gave him no answer. So he shook his wings a little, gave one flirt of his slender black tail, and dropped head foremost into a white-currant-bush. At the end of five minutes he said—

“ Chuckle, chuckle, chuckle, ”

softly among the leaves. And when he emerged from that currant-bush some time afterwards, he was barely able to fly.

By that hour the fairies had flown far away, and the dockin on the garden wall stood limp and dejected. But it always remembered to the end of its life, which was not a long one, that it had once sheltered—for so the dockin flattered itself—two live fairies from a shower. And that was more than the tallest cactus dahlia in the garden could have said, provided it spoke with any regard for truth.

The fairies, however, forgot all about the dockin immediately; for Trefoil, the very moment the black-bird began to sing, darted out, and called to Rose Red—

“Come along—the rain’s over. Let’s be flying!”

The two little Elves caught each other’s hands, sprang into the air and were gone in a moment. It only looked as though a kind of double butterfly had fluttered over the garden wall, one half rose-colour, one half green. But they went much faster than a butterfly, or even than a bee. The sun warmed their wings, and that made them swifter still. They sailed up over a heathery knoll, and skimmed down the other side, and then they went zigzagging along the side of a stream where flag-lilies grew, and looked at themselves in the water.

Rose Red was complaining again by this time. He said that Trefoil’s way of flying did not suit his own in



the least. He liked to "fly straight ahead," and to lose no time in "getting there." But it was quite impossible to make good time if you were hand in hand with a fairy who indulged in constant excursions to right and left after nothing in particular, and every now and then did a wild bit of "fancy flying" with no object in the world, as there was nobody there to see him.

Trefoil was quite surprised. It was a new idea to him that he should wait to find an excellent reason for doing a thing before he did it. However, he replied good-humouredly—

"All right! let go, then."

And no sooner had they let go each other's hands, than he espied a drop of water falling from a high branch. He was immediately impelled to dive down after it and catch it before it should reach the ground—which he did. That is a creditable feat, even for a fairy, and the English Elf was quite prepared to admire it candidly. But before he could open his lips to say so, Trefoil was off again, and this time chasing a little gray-and-white seed of a dandelion puff, that had lost its way, and was sailing up and down, in great danger of being eaten up shortly by a green linnet. Trefoil blew it along with all his might, trying to send it against the wind, which was clearly impossible, as the seed-vessel was much too light

to steer ; and he sang aloud to it in his clear thread of a voice—

“ Dandy-puff, dandy-puff !
Take your time, and time enough.
Dandy-puff, dandy-puff !
Don't you like this rhyme enough ?
Dandy-puff, dandy-puff ! ”——

He was so pleased with his occupation that it was some moments before the voice of Rose Red reached his ears, saying something about “an exhibition of pure folly.”

“ Buds and blossoms ! ” exclaimed Trefoil. “ I had forgotten the Elf. What's the matter now ? ”

“ Oh, nothing of the slightest consequence, ” said Rose Red sarcastically. “ When you have quite done with your fluffs and your follies, perhaps you will kindly let me know, and then we can be getting on again. But don't hurry on my account. I shall await your convenience *here.* ”

And he folded his wings and dropped with absolute precision on the crest of a daisy.

“ Dandy-puff, dandy-puff !
I'm afraid he's in a huff, ”

sang Trefoil after his dear little seedling. But he let the seedling go, and dropped down immediately to the

ground, where he found Rose Red standing up with great dignity on the daisy, and snubbing it because one side of its fringe was more rosy than the other. He said he hoped that little bud beside it would grow up in a very different manner! After that, he felt better; and the daisy, to tell the truth, did not feel a bit the worse, for it was not a sensitive flower, nor very easily crushed.

"Have you done now?" Trefoil asked, looking up innocently at his friend.

"Have *I* done!" the English Elf retorted, looking down indignantly at Trefoil. "I've done nothing yet, except flutter about and dawdle after you. Three good hours of this day are gone already, and I haven't yet made out where you are bound for, or what we are both of us after. I vow it takes all the stiffness out of one's wings to be kept dangling at a loose end so. It's *No Fun*," he added: and that is an expression of great import, which is common to the fairies of all nations.

"But in the name of nonsense, then," Trefoil asked him, very seriously, "since you don't know where you are going—and neither do I—why are you in such a way because we aren't getting there?"

"Why?—because it's a wretched waste of time," said the English Elf.

"Listen to him," shouted Trefoil to the world at large.

"A waste of time! Why, you've come to a country where there's no such thing as a waste of time, Fay! We have no value for time here. There's lashings of it more than anybody knows what to do with. You couldn't waste your time in Ireland, if you were trying at it all day and night."

But Rose Red turned quite pale at the prospect before him. He slipped off his daisy and sat on the ground, looking decidedly miserable. "I shall hate it. I shall certainly hate the whole country," he declared pathetically. "I never heard of a place like this, where time is of no value. It's quite unnatural. Oh, Trefoil, let us start off somewhere instantly, and find something to do—something *to do!*" he repeated imploringly, gazing at the Irish Elf, as if he were half afraid of hearing the next moment that there was nothing to do.

"Ah, be asy now," said Trefoil soothingly; "and if you can't be asy, be as asy as you can! We'll do anything you like. What's to hinder us? I'll fight you with pleasure, if you think you'd feel any better for it."

"What about?" cried Rose Red eagerly.

"What about? what about?" murmured Trefoil. "I'm bothered if I know. Sure, anything will do. Good friends needn't be too particular."

“But if we haven’t any reason to fight, there’s no *sense* in it,” said Rose Red, beginning to despond again.

“I declare I never saw such an Elf as you,” Trefoil cried. “Nothing will satisfy you. It’s most unreasonable to be wanting sense in things that haven’t got any. Can’t you be a little reasonable? I think you’re about as bad as a Bee.”

Rose Red only gasped. This kind of language addressed to an English Elf for the first time is apt to turn him a trifle giddy. And when Trefoil began to throw somersaults very fast over a leaf and back again he shut his eyes for a moment to recover himself. Trefoil had been struck by an idea, and this was how it always took him.

“As bad as a Bee,” he cried; “but that gives me a notion. “I’ll take you to the seat of war, my fine fay! and you may help us to fight the Bees. *That* will give you something to do, I fancy; and if you don’t find sense enough and over in it, it’s a pity.”

“Come on, come on! I’m your fay,” cried Rose Red, jumping to his feet and fluttering his wings in a frenzy of impatience to be gone.

“All right, we’re going,” said Trefoil, who was also deeply excited.

But first he hurried over to the other side of the daisy, where the daisy-bud grew. It was a tight, little, round green bud, with just a speck of crimson visible; and Trefoil kissed it carefully. Now if any flower-bud before it opens has the luck to be kissed by a fairy, that flower is safe from being pecked or injured by bird or beetle for the rest of its natural life. This the daisy-bud was too young to know; but the full-blown daisy knew it perfectly well, and shed a petal for pure emotion at the sight. Trefoil had gone before it fell, so he didn't see it.

He was in a desperate hurry now. He had Rose Red by the hand again; and, judging by the resolute way they were both flying along, heads down against the wind, you could not have told which was the most in earnest about "getting there," the Green Fairy or the Red.

Rose Red only put a single question on the way.

"Where?" he asked briefly.

And Trefoil told him—

"To the 'Foxglove Camp.'"

CHAPTER II.

THE FOXGLOVE CAMP.

THE Foxglove Camp was on a hill slope just below a wood of birch and ash, and glistening holly.

The place is known to a great many Fairies now, since Lara, the chief of Glen Cloy, came there one night, before his luck was broken, and learnt how to win back his bride, whom a Fairy King had hidden in the heart of Tievara. But that was a very long time ago, and only the Fairies remember it. Nothing is changed in the place, however, since Lara and Ailish were lovers. The trees throw their long shadows down from the edge of the wood over the grass and the gray rocks scattered together below ; and everywhere tall Foxgloves grow, and rear up their spires of red bells, a double line on each stalk. They grow in ranks upon ranks, hundreds of green Foxgloves with thousands of red bells ; and when

the breeze blows softly, they sway a little and swing all one way, like pines before a gale, but noiselessly.

The Foxglove Fairies live inside the flowers, when they are at home. For this reason each red bell is most carefully hung, is lined with something softer than felt, and freckled all over inside in the most fascinating manner. It gives quite the impression of being in a palace, when you have so many important Beings living one over another, as you find on a Foxglove stem. The Foxglove Fairies are immensely proud of their homes, and often declare that they cannot for their *wings* imagine what leads the Bluebell Fairies to prefer their own abodes, so blue and dim and narrow as these must be, and then—owing to their shape—so unprotected !

But the Bluebell Fairies have no enemies, so they do not care. They have no ambitions, no grievances, and very little energy. They are dreamy little creatures, but lovely to see.

Now the Foxglove Fairies *have* enemies, for they have a life-long feud with the Bees : and this feud is their joy and pride, and the principal occupation of their lives. If anything were to end it, no one can guess how miserable they would be ; but nothing is likely to end it. As for what began it, if you can tell what began the trouble between the east wind and the ladybirds, you can tell

that, too. It began just when Bees and Fairies found themselves with their opposite instincts in the same world : and that was long enough before the beginning of history, at any rate.

The Bees wanted honey—were always wanting honey. The Fairies, who had a sublime indifference to honey on their own account, at first paid no great attention, and let the Bees come to their Foxglove bells for honey, as often as they wanted to. But the Bees, as they increased in substance, rather declined in good manners ; as tactless creatures, afflicted with one idea, are apt to do. They began to come too often, and so made themselves a nuisance.

Especially they gave offence by entering at Foxglove doors when the Fairy owners were asleep, and disturbing them. Nothing can be crosser than a Fairy disturbed in his sleep, and so the Bees found out.

“The idea of being woken up at broad noon, to find a great Bee with his hairy black legs, crawling about in the bell for honey, and rumpling the whole place! I protest!” exclaimed Freak, a Fairy of great character.

When Freak protested, a number of other Fairies generally protested after him in chorus, and amongst them this time were Freckle and Starlight and Speck. They remonstrated openly with the Bees, but they did

not receive in consequence that graceful apology which the occasion seemed to demand.

The Bees merely remarked that *their* habit was to work by day and sleep by night ; a habit which all nature must approve, and which they strongly recommended the Fairies to acquire.

There was an air of conscious superiority about this reply that was irritating to a high degree. For Fairies, as every one knows, do no work at all, but they are very frequently up all night and busy about their own affairs, especially if there is moonlight abroad. So they naturally require to sleep by daylight, and, in fact, their favourite hour for a *siesta* is broad noon. It will be seen, therefore, that the remarks of the Bees were decidedly in bad taste ; and they were so deeply resented by the Fairies, that Freak, in the heat of the moment, made a statement which has never yet been forgotten by his own side, or forgiven by the other. It was to the effect that " a Bee will do anything for honey."

This may be true, or it may not. But without any doubt the youngest Fairy of the present day, when in need of some injurious reflection to cast upon his foe, still finds it convenient to revert to the classical imputation that " a Bee will do anything for honey."

While matters were in this condition, it was discovered

by Eye-Bright, a Fairy of an investigating turn of mind, that the Bees actually did not consume the honey they were so determinedly bent on gathering, *but hoarded it up in secret places*. This dire information was imparted by Eye-Bright without delay to the three most influential of the Foxglove Fairies—Freak and Freckle and Speck; who, with all their experience in the ways of the world, were so deeply shocked that at first they were reduced to hoping helplessly that it couldn't be true. But conviction came to them all too soon, and they proceeded to take the necessary measures. They published abroad conclusive proofs of the horrid avarice of the Bees, their slavish methods, and their open and unnatural devotion to honey-making. The secret hoards of honey were pointed out as positive evidence of their covetous carefulness about the future. Fairies were exhorted to use all their influence with the young, with opening flower-buds, and with flying things; to cherish in them a genial idleness and trust, and prevent them from suffering—the flowers, especially—from unavoidable contact with honey-getting Bees. Some fears were expressed lest the Butterflies should be contaminated by the example of the Bees; but these proved, happily, groundless. The Butterflies were incorruptibly firm against all temptations to industry. They preserve to

this very day, indeed, their perfect fealty to idleness and sunshine, and happy-go-lucky feasts in "meadows painted with delight."¹

The next thing to be done was to call a great indignation meeting of the Foxglove Fairies. It was announced for the first moonlight night, to be held on the largest Burdock leaf in the neighbourhood. That was a huge leaf, and most accommodating in shape; but the Foxglove Fairies attended in such numbers that an overflow meeting had to be organised on the Burdock leaf next in size below. Eye-Bright was the principal speaker, and he addressed the meeting standing on the apex of an empty yellow snail-shell, which had been carried up all that distance for the purpose. He was very imperfectly heard, but he was thoroughly understood. Every Fairy knew all that he had to say beforehand, and agreed with it. Nothing can be more conducive to enthusiasm than this kind of intelligence between an orator and his audience. So feeling ran very strongly indeed, and showed itself by stamping; for a Fairy does not hoot when he wishes to express reprobation of the absent: he folds his wings tightly, and stamps. The meeting was such an unqualified

¹ There is no authentic record anywhere of a provident Butterfly. Even if a German were to discover one, and to publish it in Leipzig, it would hardly be believed there.

success in this way that the Burdock leaves did not thoroughly recover from the enthusiasm of others all that summer; they suffered from a kind of limpness which was quite foreign to their constitution. But next year found them all right again, and as stiff as ever.

It should not be omitted from this account of the events which led to the great Honey Feud—for it is the only account as yet written—that the Foxglove Fairies were really anxious not to condemn the Bees unheard. They knew it was useless to invite them to attend any meeting held by moonlight, and, considering recent passages, it might even have been thought invidious to do so. But the Bees were formally requested to send any delegates they chose, to explain and defend their conduct before a committee of impartial Fairies sitting in a Kingcup; the whole inquiry to be conducted *by daylight*.

To this proposal the Bees responded quite simply and informally that they “were hard at work, and hadn’t time to do anything of the sort.”

And the Fairies, on receiving their message, gave way to disgust and wrath. One said that it was an admission of guilt; another that it was a piece of flat insolence; but all were so much surprised that they agreed it was exactly what might have been expected. Fairy Freak,

however, rose to the occasion—that is, he rose to the top of the nearest flower, and there delivered his mind.

“Foxglove Fairies!” he exclaimed, “the time for speech-making is over” (here a little Fairy, innocent of sarcastic intention, applauded); “the time for action has arrived” (here they all applauded). “Bees have always been known as honey-makers; but now we know them for honey-*hoarders*. They are avaricious—they are incorrigible; they are despisers of sweet idleness. Shall we, knowing them for what they are, admit these creatures any longer to our bells and blossoms?¹ Never. Let them seek elsewhere for the only thing they value—their honey! There are other flowers in the land; but Foxgloves at least shall be closed against them—closed *and defended*. Fairies, let us fly at once to fortify our homes against the Bees! And may each one who hears me prepare to live henceforward as a defender of the FOXGLOVE CAMP!”

There was wild excitement, but not an instant's hesitation. It was a great moment for Freak; he had practically declared the opening of the long Honey Feud. The Fairies rose on their wings, and flew round and round him in a circle, and the scarlet Pimpernel beneath his feet glowed like a red planet of war. The

¹ Fairy for “our hearths and homes.”

next moment they were all gone—flown to the Foxglove Camp.

* * * * *

It is needless to say how many, many weeks or months had passed from that summer day to this one, when Trefoil brought the English Elf to the seat of a Fairy war. It is needless, and I do not deny that it would be difficult also. For Fairy chronology is so simple that it is mortally hard to understand ; while its own compilers say its chief beauty is that you need hardly ever refer to it. But it was, in any case, a very long time indeed, so long that you might suppose any quarrel would be over and done with by that time. Which would prove that you knew nothing at all of how things can last in Ireland, when the climate suits them.

CHAPTER III.

SEED O' VALOUR.

TREFOIL and Rose Red flew into the Foxglove Camp at an early hour of the afternoon, when the light was strong, the wind was laid, and the Foxgloves stood as steady as the rocks beside them.

Rose Red was impressed by the sight of so many tall, fine flowers, for he knew that each flower was a fort, and he admired the red dazzle of colour, as Trefoil flew in and out—in and out amongst them. Everything that belonged to the art of war had a deep interest in it for the English Elf, and just now he was going to have a hand in the fighting ; so for the first time since his landing in Ireland, he realised plainly what he was about. It made him keenly happy, and he felt like a brother to Trefoil.

That erratic fay, after skimming about like a streak of

light from one tall stem to another, made a sudden dart inside a Foxglove bell, and drew Rose Red in after him. There stood one gallant defender of the fort, leaning on his spear, which was made of a long whin-prickle, stiff and sharp—a gruesome weapon.

“More power to your elbow, Seed o' Valour!” cried Trefoil, as he fluttered in.

“Is that yourself, Trefoil?” said the spear-bearer cordially.

“It is then, and more too. Here's an English Elf, by the name of Rose Red, that has found himself on the right side of the Channel—saving his presence—more by good luck than good guidance, I doubt.”

“He's welcome, anyway,” said Seed o' Valour, who thought he recognised a kindred spirit in this visitor.

“And he's just spoiling for a fight,” added Trefoil, as a touch of irresistible attraction.

“He's come in time, then,” cried the valiant one. “We're to have a field-day with the Bees before the sun goes down.”

“So I judged, from the look of the camp as we came in,” said Trefoil, with his knowing air. “Every bud on duty! Well, here we part company for the present. Three in a bell would spoil the fun. Tell us who's in want of an ally for the day, Seed o' Valour?”

“Let’s see ; let’s see, then. There’s Wary near at hand. No. Hold on! There’s Fly-by-Night ; he’s all alone.”

“I’m his fay, then,” and Trefoil was half out of the bell at the word. “*Where?*” he called back, as he took to his wings.

“West of these lines, south of the ferny rock,” Seed o’ Valour shouted after him.

Then he turned back to Rose Red, who all this while had not spoken one word.

“Have you had any experience with Bees?” the Irish Elf inquired cheerfully, resuming his spear and his martial attitude.

“No—not of this kind. We have no quarrel with Bees where I come from,” the English Elf replied.

“No? They don’t make honey there, I suppose?” said Seed o’ Valour reflectively.

“Yes, they do. But we have no objection to their making honey,” said the other.

This was puzzling for both.

“You belong to the great Rose tribe, I understand,” said Seed o’ Valour deferentially.

“The Red Rose,” said the English Elf.

Then they bowed to each other, and it was charming to see those fairy bows. One was so dignified, and one so debonair.

"Well, now, as a matter of curiosity, supposing a lot of brown Ants were to come in their hundreds and raise an ant-heap at the very foot of your parent stem, what should you do?" inquired Seed o' Valour earnestly.

"Let them alone," said Rose Red.

After which there was a pause.

"I know that Wood-spiders cannot be considered interesting, from an enemy's point of view," remarked Seed o' Valour. "They have no stings, and they are intrusive, but not really spirited." The tone of his voice was calmly judicial. "Still, if you had no better enemies convenient, and if you wanted to keep your hand in, why—*have* you, as a matter of fact, ever engaged with Wood-spiders?"

"Never," said Rose Red.

There was another pause.

"Well, I'm bothered!" cried the Irish Elf at last, aloud. "I can answer for it that I know a soldier's face when I see it, and you have that face, and yet you have never fought with Bees or Ants or even Wood-spiders. How do you account for it?"

"In England there have been no civil broils for longer than any one can remember," Rose Red explained. "If any fay is absolutely bent on fighting, he must go abroad for it. And yet," he added slowly, "it could not

have been always so ; for there is a tradition that some of our race—— But never mind that ! ”

“ They were fighters, I’ll be sworn on the Rainbow ! ” cried Seed o’ Valour excitedly. “ I knew it.”

“ Oh, it’s only a tradition,” said Rose Red again.

He told it reluctantly ; for if he had a stronger feeling than his love of the *precise* truth, it was his dislike to the merest shadow of a boast. But the Irish Elf was burning to know.

“ Why, they *say*,” he admitted, “ that some of our race¹ a long time ago had their commissions from a Fairy Queen to fight Bats for their wings, and to skirmish with Owls at night. It’s only a tradition, though ; I can’t positively——”

“ To fight Bats ! *Bats*,” repeated Seed o’ Valour, with mingled awe and delight, “ why, there’s nothing living

¹ Fortunately there is the very highest authority for the tradition of which Rose Red was but vaguely aware.

“ *Titania.* Come, now a roundel, and a fairy song ;
Then, for the third part of a minute, hence ;
Some, to kill cankers in the musk-rose buds ;
*Some, war with rere-mice for their leathern wings,
To make my small elves coats ; and some, keep back
The clamorous owl, that nightly hoots, and wonders
At our quaint spirits.*”

A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Act II. Scene iii.

wickeder than a Bat ! Just look at the size of them !— and they bite like fiends. “As wicked as a Bat,” is a proverb with us. Sure, what a race they must have been, those people of your own ! Always come of a fighting race, when you get your choice, I say, and then you'll never repent it. Look now, fay ; you must have inherited some traditions of their mode of attack and defence, and so on. Now if you 'll undertake to lead a campaign against the Bats, I'll serve under you with pleasure ; amongst the Foxglove Fairies alone we could enlist several companies in an hour and then——”

“But I wouldn't undertake anything of the sort,” said Rose Red firmly. “I don't know anything about it. Remember, I told you it was only a tradition of long ago. And there is nothing to prove that our people ever got the better of the Bats,” he added scrupulously. “Perhaps they didn't.”

“What about that ?” said Seed o' Valour scornfully. “They fought them.”

“There was probably no sense in it,” Red Rose objected.

“There must have been splendid fun in it,” Seed o' Valour insisted.

“Well, don't let us make fools of ourselves following their example, anyway,” said the English Elf.

“I wish I just saw my way to a chance of it,” said the Irish one. He sighed deeply.

The number of brilliant and highly dangerous schemes for the acquisition of fun and fame, over which this Fairy had sighed and resigned himself, were now past counting. It was extraordinary how obstinately other Fairies would refuse to join in the plans he was never weary of laying before them—plans in which, as he constantly pointed out, the main thing, diversion, was a certainty, the only risk was to life and limb. No wonder he sighed often.

Rose Red, who had not succeeded in extracting much “sense” out of Trefoil that morning, felt a strong persuasion that he would not find much more in Seed o’ Valour. It was evident that the excitable Elf was much depressed. He sat down in a desponding way, laid his spear across his knees, bent his pretty head on his hands, and was silent.

Rose Red devoted himself to examining the Foxglove bell. At one end he seemed in a kind of crimson dusk, at the other end he was attracted by the rich, soft mottling laid over the colour. There was plenty of air in the bell, but it was shady in there, and, though he repelled the idea at first, it recurred to him with conviction that it was sleepy in there, too. He knew he was on guard against

an enemy, therefore he could not be really sleepy; yet he was. And this reasoning proved it; he shook himself, and determined to talk.

"Seed o' Valour," he began, "shall I relieve your watch at the mouth of the bell?"

"I'm not watching," said Seed o' Valour, after a pause, without lifting his head; and it was evident that he was not.

"I thought we were expecting the enemy," said the English Elf.

"Enemy?—the Bees?—so we are," Seed o' Valour, repeated drowsily.

He shook himself, too; he was evidently as sleepy as he could be.

"How do we know when they are coming?" Rose Red demanded, with energy.

"If you're awake, you hear them buzz; if you're asleep, you don't" Seed o' Valour explained, with perfect frankness.

"What on earth makes us both so sleepy?" Rose Red asked him.

"It's because we're in a Foxglove bell. It's always deadly sleepy in here, unless one has something particular to do. That's how the Bees get the better of us, when they catch us asleep."

“Do they——?” Rose Red began, and hesitated.

“Often,” said the other calmly.

“My wings,” ejaculated the English Elf, “what a nuisance this sleepiness is !”

“Not a bit,” said Seed o’ Valour. “Sure, you can’t be better off than sleeping, unless you’re awake.”

“And if you’re awake when a Bee comes in, then——”

“Then begins the tug o’ war.”

“And you put him out ?”

“*That*, as you may say in a manner of speaking, is just as it may be.”

“Well—ah ! what sort of Bees give you the most trouble ?”

“There are only two sorts of bees,” Seed o’ Valour declared, speaking with all the assurance of a lecturer on scientific classification. “There are the Bumble-bees, which have no stings, and the Others, which have. You can tell when a Bumble-bee comes within a mile of you by the noise he makes. *Whizz-z-z—Buzz !* Sometimes it sounds as if he blew a trumpet in front of him. *Tra-la-la !* He can’t help it, you know ; it’s the way his wings annoy the air. But it prevents him from approaching with any sort of stratagem, of course ; you could hear him, at this moment, if he were in the third bell overhead. When he effects an entrance it’s by sheer force ; and

though he has no sting, his strength makes him formidable, once inside the bell : for there is no Bee as strong as a Bumble-bee. If he gets on top of you, you're crumpled to a helpless heap, and he makes off with the honey. You see, it's just a case of hard tussling with a Bumble-bee ; but if one of the Others gets in, it's a fight. By the same token, Fay, you haven't got the sign of a weapon on you ! What on earth have I been dreaming of all this time ?" And Seed o' Valour sprang to his feet, blushing deeply.

"I'll get you one this instant," he exclaimed ; "for I laid up a whole stock of whin-spears at the foot of this Foxglove."

And he dropped to the ground from the lip of the bell, as lightly as a spark of dew.

"By the whole of the Rainbow !" he exclaimed, re-appearing in a rage, "if the villains of Fairies haven't been helping themselves from my pile, and not a weapon have they left behind them but one scandalous, old blunt thorn that wouldn't prick a midge ! Thieves of the world that they are, why couldn't they go and forage for themselves ?" he demanded fiercely.

"I'm sure I don't know," said Rose Red.

"You don't ? Well, don't talk to me, then ! Mother-o'-fortune !-isn't-it-a-scandalous-thing-that-the-Foxglove-

Camp-should-be-in-that-through-other-condition-that-if-only-a-little-*slieveen* - of - a-scout-brings-in-word-of-the-enemy's-coming-it-sets-the-soldiers-to-stealing-weapons-for-themselves-in-the-light-of-day-and-the-face-of-discipline?-Is-there-another-camp-in-Ireland-where-you'd-hear-the-like-of-such-carryings-on?-*is-there-now?*” he inquired, stamping his foot at Rose Red.

“Not that I know of,” answered the English Elf slowly, lost in wonder at the length of time one breath had held out in that fiery little body.

“Then why don't you stand out of my road, and leave me room to be gone, if you know so much? Sure, I'll have to fly clean away over the hill, and down the other side where the Whin grows, before I can get so much as a seasoned prickle to make a pike for you!”

“Don't do anything of the sort,” urged Rose Red. “It's absurd. Why, I don't even know the use of a pike!”

“Nor you won't either, till you get one,” Seed o' Valour told him. “There, I've left my spear for you. Be asy now, till I come back. Only remember not to be forgetting that you're on guard!”

The last words came faintly back, for Seed o' Valour had flown.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TUG OF WAR.

“MY wings!” said Rose Red slowly to himself: “and a nice position it is for me.”

Yet he seemed not altogether displeased with his position either, and not in the least alarmed.

“I shall make a fool of myself, as sure as nuts are brown!” he calmly prophesied to the Foxglove bell, as he walked to where the spear was lying; took it up, and weighed it in his hand.

His fingers tightened round it, as though they were accustomed to it. He swung it steadily back and forwards once or twice, to learn its weight; took accurate aim at nothing, and made a thrust in the air. Strange to say, he did not once lose the weapon. To an impartial observer it would have seemed that the English Elf was *not* about to make a fool of himself

in this particular line of conduct. But he shook his head.

“I hope Seed o’ Valour, when he comes back to his home, may find all the honey he left in it. But I doubt that,” he reflected. “What an extraordinary Elf he is! Trefoil was distracting enough, but this one——. I don’t think I more than half understand them, and that’s the truth,” he admitted with a wondering candour to himself.

Then a thin and distant sound struck on his ear ; a far-thrilling “Bizz-z-z.”

“They’re coming,” he decided, and nodded to himself, apparently with entire satisfaction. He went and stood at the opening of the bell, the spear in one hand, the other curved to his ear, and his head bent down, listening.

First came a sound from one side, then from the other. He heard them travelling, drawing nearer, crossed by other sounds that thickened and grew louder, till the air was full of humming and buzzing, and sawn asunder into a thousand little thrills in a minute, from the cutting of innumerable gauzy wings. The Bees were in the Camp. They had entered from below, and were working upwards slowly and steadily, in increasing numbers and noise. They spread through the ranks of

the Foxgloves, and one after another attacked the tall stems hung with their tiers of bells. Some began at the smallest open flower near the top, and buzzed steadily downwards into bell after bell. Some began at the largest flower on the stem, which is the lowest, and worked their way upwards, bell after bell. The Bees were perfectly methodical in their progress. They had not come here for fun ; they had not come to exercise their troops ; they had come for honey. Honey was all they wanted, and in some cases more than they got.

It was difficult to judge exactly what amount of success attended their efforts, for all this curious warfare was carried on out of sight. Sometimes a Bee remained for a considerable time inside one bell, occupied ; sometimes he left it in a suspicious hurry, followed by nothing but the delicious sound of a fairy laugh. But you could infer nothing from the Bee's demeanour either of his triumph or of his defeat. For the buzz of a Bee expresses but three things, and always the same things ; that he is hot, that he is annoyed, and that he is busy. Sometimes he is hot because he is annoyed ; and sometimes he is annoyed because he is hot ; but always he is busy, because he is a Bee.

Now Rose Red stood with his spear in his hand and

waited. Those who know, say that there is nothing so trying to a young soldier as to be kept waiting ; but this Elf stood the test admirably. He waited a long time, for the flower he was in grew on the higher ground of the Foxglove Camp, which was reached last of all by the Bees. Only once he became disturbed, and that was when a sudden breeze swept down the hill, carrying away all sound of the conflict, so that he fancied the Bees must have left the Camp without finding him. Then, had it not been for Seed o' Valour's last word to him—"On Guard !" he would certainly have flown from the bell and sought his foe on wing. That would have been a fatal mistake ; for, apart from the fact that no Bee ever born would waste his precious time in fighting any foe except one who stood directly between himself and his honey, Rose Red by abandoning his post would have missed a most brilliant opportunity for distinction, which was at that very time on its way to him.

Another moment, and he heard it coming, just as Seed o' Valour had said he would. A great, dark, yellow-banded creature hovered outside the bell, making the air spin with his buzzing, while his wings quivered so fast that they were invisible. Then he launched himself inside, bending all the crimson bell with his weight ; the buzzing ceased, the wings were laid back and the thick,



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black legs began to crawl. Rose Red gave himself plenty of time. The self-possession of this Elf was almost incredible; he actually observed the Bee in detail—his dull eyes, his black-furred body, and his brown, gauzy wings—before he made a single movement against him. Then having retreated to the farthest limit of the bell, he grasped his spear, bent his back, took a run and tilted right at the Bee. So true was his aim that the astonished Bee found himself lifted half off his legs, and with a terrible prick in the very middle of his chest before he could have said "John Lubbock." After that he did not wait a minute, he retreated with all the speed his legs could make, and with nothing else; half falling from the flower before he could find his wings, or the presence of mind to use them, and leaving all the others on the stem unmolested, he buzzed heavily away. Now this was no coward, but an experienced Bumble Bee; and it seems to prove that experience is not of much use in turning a soldier out of a honey-maker.

The inexperienced Rose Red, elated but out of breath, leaned against his flower for support, with sensations such as he had never felt before. One of them was across his shoulders, but another was in a different place, from which it would never be rubbed out.

He said nothing at all to himself, not even "My

wings!" But when he had finished rubbing his shoulder, he picked up his spear again, and examined the point. It had neither bent nor broken off; for the weapon was of Irish make, and that was fortunate indeed for Rose Red, who was just about to want it more than ever.

This time he had very little notice. No long-drawn, droning "*Buzz—z!*" was sounded before the enemy to his ears. He heard but a single fierce, deep "*Hum!*" and the Bee had lit inside his bell. No blundering Bumble this. "One of the Others"—was all he had time to think, before he and the shining-brown slender invader were fighting as though they had known each other all their lives. There was no thought of retreat in this Bee's head. At the very first prick of the spear she was in a towering passion, and a Bee in a passion, as all the world knows, is a most dangerous thing to meet. Rose Red did not want to meet it; he wanted the Whinprickle to meet it, and he was quite right. But to this day, although he is a most accurate-minded Fairy, he finds a difficulty in giving an accurate account of those forty-five seconds he spent with an Irish Bee inside a Foxglove bell. They were confused, but full of incident. All that he can say with certainty is—

“She fought and I fought. She had a sting and I had a spear.”

In truth the strain was tremendous, and as such it was felt, not only by the Bee and the Fairy, but also by the Foxglove bell. For the summer home which Seed o' Valour had chosen to himself was the lowest bell on the stem, now fully blown, and since that last encounter with the heavy Bumble Bee, possibly even a little loose in its calyx. It proved unequal to sustaining any longer the tug of war which strained the flower downwards—it fell.

Fairy, Bee and bell, came to the ground together, and the shock of the catastrophe was so great that it stunned them for nearly a minute. Winged creatures are accustomed to all sorts of accidents in the air, but not to falling, not to being dropped on the hard ground, imprisoned with an enemy in a close bell which prevents either from using his wings, and which collapses impartially upon both, like a tent when the centre pole has been knocked down. No wonder the effect was stunning.

The combatants, on recovering their senses, made a mutual though unconcerted movement of avoidance. The Bee crept out at the wide end of the bell and flew away. The Fairy crept out at the narrow end, only lately apparent, and sat down.

Oh, how hot he was! how hot and exhausted!

He laid himself out flat upon a Sorrel-leaf—Sorrel is so cool and refreshing—and shut his eyes. A little Butterfly that was hovering up and down in the light, came near and noticed him.

“It is painful to see anything as hot as that,” thought the Butterfly, and fanned him with her wings.

They were beautiful wings, gray on one side and blue on the other, with a feathery rim to each. She was a small and dainty butterfly. Rose Red opened his eyes when he felt her near, and turned his cheek to her fanning.

“You must have been exerting yourself a great deal too much,” the Butterfly said to him in her light, *staccato* voice, but not at all as if she cared much.

Rose Red only turned the other cheek.

“You shouldn’t do it,” she continued indifferently, fanning on. “I never do. If any one wants *me* to exert myself, I merely say, ‘Isn’t one flower as good as another?’ That is my motto. What do you think of it?”

“Nothing,” said Rose Red. He privately thought it nonsense.

“You probably don’t understand me quite. But it was a Fairy who taught me that; only he sometimes

put it another way, and said, "What's the odds as long as you're happy?" Now you can't be happy if you have a fixed object, and get hot over it. Something may happen to any object at any minute. But if you have dozens of objects as thick as Meadow-sweet in a hedge, you can pursue them one after another, just as long as you please. Then, whatever happens, you don't care a bit. That's the way to be happy."

"You're a very pretty little Butterfly," said Rose Red, in his tactless way.

He had been admiring her wings as they opened and shut, and not giving her remarks the attention which he ought to have known they deserved. The result was that he lost his refreshment of a fanning; for the little Butterfly was annoyed, and flew away.

She knew very well how pretty her wings were; any thick-headed field-flower could have told her as much. But from a live, intelligent Fairy, she had expected some notice of her strength of intellect, which she knew was remarkable for a Butterfly. That is the way with these pretty creatures. It annoys them to be thought only prettily blue and gray, when they want to prove themselves intellectual forces. But of course the little Butterfly was inconsistent; instead of being annoyed, she ought to have sought another object, and not have cared a bit.

Meanwhile there came to Red Rose on his Sorel-leaf the sound of a voice from overhead, and it cried—

“Mother of fortune ! what kind of work is this ?”

“Seed o’ Valour ! Seed o’ Valour !” called the English Elf ; “come down here.”

And Seed o’ Valour fluttered down, a long whin-prickle pointing from his hand, an eager inquiry preceding him through the air.

“Did they come ? Are they gone ? What have you done ?”

“They came,” said Rose Red, “and they are gone. What I did I don’t exactly know ; but I’m afraid I’ve broken your spear doing it.”

Then he gave him a short account of what had passed, unadorned, but impressive. It was a plain, unvarnished tale as ever was delivered, and its effect on Seed o’ Valour, therefore, was all the greater. The Irish Elf being eloquent himself, had for the eloquence of others no sort of value. Deeds were the only persuasion that availed with him, and now, seeing his own Foxglove bell lying on the ground, growing flatter every moment, he was more than eloquently persuaded. Besides Rose Red had justified his own penetration, when he called him a soldier on the strength of his face, and Seed o’ Valour was not the Fairy to be indifferent to that. Even in the

fresh disappointment of having missed the fight, he rejoiced all over that such an opportunity had befallen to distinguish a brilliant recruit.

Determined to make the most of it, he flew off instantly to summon his comrades in arms from their bell-tents to come and see the ruin of his own, and the "jewel of a soldier" only just enlisted, who had helped to bring it down.

They came, and finding the ruin in no way different from others of its kind, they turned their attention to the soldier, who seemed certainly different from others of his kind, and was indeed even more different than he seemed. The deeds of Rose Red, told by the tongue of Seed o' Valour, worked like a charm on the soldiers, and round about the pair gathered the sympathetic Fox-glove Fairies in a circle—wishing the newcomer "Good-luck!" "more power!" "a crown to his name!" "the wind in his wings!" and a number of other valuable wishes.

Among the rest came Trefoil, with Fly-by-Night, who was a friend of his—a Fairy of a mysterious disposition, and lonely habits quite unlike his own. They had been defending a bell together, and had "very poor fun with it," as Fly-by-Night complained. Trefoil, however, was quite restored to gaiety by the successes of Rose Red.

"So you found 'something to do'?" he said gleefully;

“and there’s no denying you were the fay to do it! I thought the Foxglove Camp was the place to suit you.”

“And I used to think it was the place to suit me,” cried Seed o’ Valour, who had but just found leisure to recollect his grievance; “but I’ll have to change my mind, or it’ll have to change its ways; one or other. D’ye mind me all, now!”

“What is wrong with the camp, Seed o’ Valour?” they cried, curiously.

“Just the fays that are in it, and the discipline that isn’t,” he replied severely. “How often have I told you all that it’s ruination to everything to leave yourselves without fresh weapons at hand in case of surprise?”

“So we did!”

“Just look at this!”

“Here’s a thorn for you!”

“Here’s a sword-grass!”

“Here’s a whin-prickle!” half-a-dozen voices cried together.

“So I see. A fine collection of weapons, entirely,” said Seed o’ Valour, in withering tones, “and a credit to the Foxglove force. Was it modesty about using your own judgment that made you think you’d all rather have thorns of my choosing? or was it laziness about the use of your own wings, ye *spalpeens*? It’s little I’d care,

though you took the lot ; if only one of you would have had the feeling to tell me what you were after doing, so that I needn't be flying over hill and down dale, missing all the fighting and losing all the fun because *you* had cleared off with every prickle of the pile as you did !”

“What pile ?” demanded Trefoil.

“The pile I had gathered and stacked under the old Foxglove here, as well they knew, the *spalpeens* !”

But this produced a chorus of denial from all the Foxglove Fairies present, who declared in the strongest language—

“By the whole of the Rainbow !”

“By the Buds and Blossoms !”

“By the light of the Moon !”

“By the flow of the Water !” that they would scorn to steal their weapons from a comrade, and they had never touched the pile.

“Very well, then,” said Seed o' Valour, rather staggered, but taking refuge in sarcasm, “I suppose it melted in the night.”

“It looks pretty solid *now*,” remarked Fly-by-Night, who for the last few moments had been intent on search. He dragged aside a large encumbering leaf, and disclosed a neat little stack of whin-prickles, bound together by a knotted blade of grass.

The Fairies raised such a shout of laughter that they startled a Fly-catcher who was darting about just over their heads, and made him miss his fly.

“More power to your elbow, Seed o’ Valour!” they shouted; “was that an ambush you laid?”

“Ah, he hides them so well, he can’t find them himself!” said one.

“Sure, ‘head o’ wit drowned the eel,’ we know,” cried another.

“Ah, *mo bouchal*, what? No escaping!”

This was because Seed o’ Valour had nimbly risen on his wings to fly, but two Fairy friends instantly caught him, one by each wrist, and held him down, while the others threw themselves on his pile of arms, drew out the prickles, and drove them all down into the ground round about him in a close palisade.

“There, you can encamp all by yourself,” one told him, “since the Foxglove Camp won’t suit you any longer, by reason of ‘the fays that are in it, and the discipline that isn’t.’ Oh to think of that!”

Here Seed o’ Valour himself gave way to laughter, and subsided suddenly on the ground. His keepers lost their hold, but the prisoner was so helpless with the joke that he could not have flown for his life; he only rocked to and fro where he sat with peals of mirth.

Rose Red was astonished that a fay who had made such a fool of himself should enjoy the fact so much. *He* only laughed when other fays made fools of themselves ; had he done it himself, it would have been a serious matter of regret to him. But apparently these Irish fays were differently constituted. He heard one slender crimson-coated creature ask Seed o' Valour—

“ Would a new rule of discipline teach the use of a pair of eyes in a hurry ? ”

And Seed o' Valour only implored him—

“ Ah, be asy a minute now ! ”

Then, rising to his feet, he pathetically offered his comrades “ a prickle apiece if they would just clear off now, and keep the story to themselves, not to make him the mock of the Camp till next new moon.”

On which there was a sudden demolishing of the palisade, the Fairies bidding Seed o' Valour observe that if they took to “ weapons of his choosing,” it was at his own request, and wishing him “ Good luck, and a cure for the eyesight,” as they fluttered off with the spears.

“ What shall we do now ? ” inquired Rose Red, as he watched the last flutterer down the hill.

“ Do ?—go to sleep,” replied Seed o' Valour, with a tiny, enchanting yawn.

“The bell has dropped, you know,” said Rose Red regretfully.

“We move to the next on the stem, of course,” said the Irish Elf; and suiting the action to the word, he rose and dived in.

The other followed him, and could have believed himself in the very same bell as before, had not this one been just perceptibly smaller.

“What should we have done if there had been another Fairy settled here?” asked he.

Seed o’ Valour was curling himself down to sleep with his wings over his head.

“Put him out,” he sweetly murmured.

CHAPTER V.

UNDER THE MOON.

THERE came a summer night, warm and still and moonshiny.

Down the hill which mortals in that country call Altaneigh the water in the burn was slipping, falling, softly pouring, in a kind of melody which waters sing only to a young summer moon. On each side of the stream birch-trees grew, leaning this way and that. These are the trees that never sleep; in the middle of the night their silver stems are gleaming. Their green thin leaves are flickering and whispering of secrets, while the sycamores sleep heavily, and the ash-trees stir in a dream. But it is on autumn nights that the birch-trees are most awake. Then they are all of silver and old gold, instead of silver and young green; but they know their time is short, and they cannot keep their gems. They

rustle and complain, and the gold falls down in round yellow zecchins, so bright, so light, that a little breeze can spin them with its breath, before the dark earth hides them away. The birch-trees, stooping sadly, cease to complain. Having lost all, they grow silent ; and at last fall asleep.

But these things are in the days of autumn. Now it is summer again, and the birch-trees are in their gleaming silver and young green. They have no belief that what has been will happen again, and they whisper happily beneath the moon, as if all their secrets had not been told over and over before to-night. The young moon is very serene. Fairies have an idea that she has been told many things, and some of them sad ones ; but she is so very far away that perhaps she does not listen much, and so they say she never grows less bright. To-night she is like a silver boat without a sail, drifting across a dark blue sea. The golden stars watch her from another sky much farther off ; and at times they see her almost at anchor on that dim depth, and at times flying like a winged thing among the shoals and torn islands of white cloud ; but floating or flying, she drifts steadily on towards the great unrifted cloud-rack in the south, which will bury her deep that night while the stars keep watch.

Low on the tender grass there lies a bright, green ring. It was never cut or planted there ; it is the Fairy Ring, and Fairy feet traced it when first they danced on the spot long, long ago, before even the beginning of the Honey Feud. Whatever should happen to the spot, whether it were dug or planted, or even burnt, next spring the Fairy Ring would re-appear in the grass, green as ever, as surely as the Fairies would come back to dance on it. It depends on the season which Fairies come. In spring there are the pale Primrose Maids, and the little shy Sprites from the Violets, who look down gravely and say sweet things. The Windflower Fairies too, who say nothing, but look more like angels than Fairies, they are so purely white, with a rose-pale flush on their wings. All these are the children amongst the flowers ; they know nothing yet, they are so young in the year, and they bring the look of another world on their faces.

The next Fairies that come are older, and merrier. Dainty little ladies in silver smocks come flying from the Cuckoo flowers. They dance among the Cowslip Lads, who are sturdy on their feet, but can swing and shake themselves with a most encouraging grace.

When these are gone there is a pause in the chain ; but at last, some starry night the Bluebell Fairies will

come, those unexampled beings, full of music and of mystery. They will not dance much, but moving in their dreamy circle on the Fairy Ring, they will sing a chorus softly sweet, which only the Maidens of the May are privileged to hear. Those tender Fairy maidens in their pearly white and pink, come gladly crowding hand in hand to hear the Bluebell music. But as it fills their ears, they hold each other tightly, their fresh cheeks grow pale, and the night dews stand in their eyes like tears; for the singing moves them strangely. They do not speak at all, but kiss their hands to the Bluebell Fairies, who bow to them like courtiers, and sighing gently, pass away to their homes in the shady wood. The music is only on starry nights, for the Bluebell Fairies are shy of the bright moonlight; they think the Moon a cold and songless Queen, too splendid to be sung to. But the stars, they say, were the first voices that ever sang together; and so their far-off twinkling seems to them like the smiling of friends that know.

And now we are at a night in midsummer, and the Fairies from the midsummer flowers are abroad, most rich and sweet. There is a company of slim young Knights of the Honeysuckle, wearing all manner of plumes and pompons, as their fashion is, for they are the real dandies of summer. They dress in satin sweetly

scented: rose and cream-colour of all shades for the Knights, and pale gold or pure silver for the Ladies, with little crested plumes. Really their attire is worth mentioning, for wherever they stray it is admired, and yet they never grow proud, but keep their graceful, clinging ways, to the perfection of sweetness. Like all fays of every degree, they are devoted to the Forget-me-not Fairies, who live by the water. They call to them, and wave them on to come and join the dance, for these shy and silent water-spirits never leave their homes unless they are called. Perhaps that is what makes them so simple and unchanging, for memory lives at home. They wear the colour of heaven for their faithfulness, and "faithful as a Forget-me-not" has become a Fairy proverb. Whoever dances with one of them takes care to place her next his heart, and then long afterwards he remembers the look of the sky-blue eyes, but that is all he remembers, for they say very little—they only love.

In Ireland grow more Forget-me-nots than anywhere else. But in every country there grow some, only they do not look all alike, and you must learn to know them even when their eyes are not of blue.

Have you ever met with the Orchis Fairies? They are many and different, but each is so original that he seems to be the only Orchis Fairy for the time. It is a

habit with the order to wear hoods; they sometimes push them back and sometimes pull them forward, and their eyes shine out from under them when they make those quaint and brief remarks which amuse the whole Fairy Ring, while they look as grave as judges themselves. They are not very sociable Fairies, but of course they dance in June, and the Foxglove Fairies are overjoyed when they find them on the Ring. For being gallant and not witty themselves, they delight in the society of wits.

The Foxglove Fairies had come in great force on this particular evening, and they brought the English Elf with them, quite sedately willing. Trefoil and Seed o' Valour had taken him under their special charge, and they were so assiduous in publishing his acts of gallantry that it amused the Orchis Fairy, Purple. Once Purple came behind them suddenly, caught Seed o' Valour by one hand and Rose Red by the other, and wheeling them skilfully in front of a shining beauty who was standing near, he said—

“ I present to you the Seed o' Valour and the Flower o' Fame ! ”

The beauty smiled at Seed o' Valour, whom she knew; and Rose Red, whom she did not know, she kissed on the cheek. Then she flew away to dance, with her silver

train shining behind her, for she was a Honeysuckle Fairy.

The Irish Fairy maidens were pleased with the English Elf, and they kissed him each once. They knew he was gallant, for Seed o' Valour had said so, and that is the one thing necessary to please an Irish maiden. They liked his yellow curls, too; and the deepening blush which was natural to his complexion they attributed to modesty.

Rose Red, for his part, found them charming, but just a little disconcerting, for they said such unexpected things. The maidens to whom he was accustomed said only things which you might guess beforehand they were going to say, and so you could have an answer ready, and keep the conversation running on familiar lines with an agreeable sense of security. But no fay ever born could guess what an Irish Fairy maid would say on any single subject, therefore answers to her remarks have to be improvised, and quickly, too, before she makes others. Now the English Elf did not improvise readily, so his usual agreeable sense of security was strangely absent to-night, and it was not restored by the discovery he made that he had been once or twice unaccountably amusing when he was not intending it. He could almost have believed that thé Irish Fairy maids were

laughing at him, were it not that the idea seemed too preposterous, for in the first place he was not in the least ridiculous—that he knew—and in the second place, in spite of anything they said their eyes remained so soft. The more he looked at their eyes, the more he determined not to do their dispositions the injustice of supposing that they could be amused at his expense. And yet he doubted.

Plainly it behoved him to dance that night in an impressive manner, and with his correctest grace, and here he was successful. All Fairies, of course, can dance with each other as naturally as they can speak with each other, though they neither dance nor speak alike, but there are certain figures both of speech and of movement common to the Fairies of all nations. For instance, they all use “No fun!” as an expression of hopeless condemnation; they all stamp with both feet when they lose their tiny tempers; they all swear “by the light of the Moon!” and they all dance the Circlet when they meet on the merry Ring at night.

So Rose Red joined them in perfect understanding, and went through the motions of the Circlet with a feeling of being entirely at home, such as he had not experienced since he flew from between the leaves of that Shakespeare. It was a very pretty dance. The



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Circlet always begins by the Fairies moving slowly round, as though they were in a procession ; then they move faster, with intricate steps and interchanging of places, the Circlet becomes a double and then a triple one. The Fairies open their wings, and without leaving the ground they whirl round so fast that they become indistinguishable one from another, and look like quivering wreaths on the grass, which break suddenly, and disperse—and the Circlet is over.

Any number can join in this dance, and at any minute ; either singly, or in pairs, or by groups. The English Elf joined singly, and when it was over he wandered away for a little, to listen to the music. Fairy music does not cease when the dance is over. It is a continuous kind of music, made of the mingling of many things—the shining of the stars, the falling of the water, the fitful scent of the flowers, the drip of the dew, the sighing of little breezes that pass through the night, all these things make the Fairy music—and the brightening of a moonlit cloud, or the opening of a flower near, is enough to change the tune.

Rose Red went down towards the stream, and thought he was alone, till he heard voices coming from under a tall Meadowsweet in the sedge.

One voice belonged to a whimsical Orchis sprite, an

inventor of riddles ; and he was just asking with great solemnity—

“ Who saw the new moon rise ?—and why ? ”

“ I don't know, oh, I don't know ! ” said his puzzled little partner. “ But if you like, I'll ask the Owl the next time I find him awake. He knows such a number of odd things.”

“ Then you may ask him too,” said the voice of the Orchis sprite, with increased solemnity, “ what happened to the Fairy who found a rush with a green top ? ”

Rose Red went elsewhere, and thought over the riddles. He always sat down when he wanted to think ; so he sat down now with his back against the firm stem of a bracken to steady his mind. But he had hardly got further than the conclusion that a rush with a green top was really an impossible subject of thought, when he heard voices again.

There were two little Fairies sitting and slowly swinging on a strand of gossamer, which stretched from this bracken round to another. When they swung backwards they were lost in the shadow of the fern ; when they swung forwards they came full under a silver moon-beam, and then one of them might have been observed to be holding the other safely on her seat. She was Breath o' Clover, and one of the sweetest things alive.

“Tell me,” she said confidentially, and her hands were clasped on his shoulder, “tell me the strangest thing that ever happened to you.” And they swung back into the shadow.

“If I do,” said a voice—and to whom should it belong but to Seed o’ Valour?—“If I do, you must never tell it again. For a soldier should not report on his own doings, except officially.” And they swung forward into the light.

“Oh, I’ll never tell,” said Breath o’ Clover sweetly. “Go on, please!”

“Well,” began Seed o’ Valour, “I don’t know if you’re aware that there is a flower called Snapdragon. Hold tight! I’m going to swing faster. It isn’t one of our kind; it grows in gardens, and so we don’t see it. Every flower on its stem is the head of a fiery dragon, in a state of grim wrath, with his jaws so tightly locked that even a Bee can’t get inside them. Only a Bumble Bee can, by using all his strength; and whenever he tries to escape again, the Dragon head makes a fearful snap at him, and gets crimson with fury. Well, of course no Fairy has ever been inside a Snapdragon, and I should never have thought of going myself, if Trefoil had not told me that a Snapdragon was living on the top of that garden wall he is always haunting, where so many Blackbirds live——”

“Oh, I *hope* you didn’t go!” cried little Breath o’ Clover, who would have been deeply disappointed all the same if the story had stopped there, because of his not having gone.

“Well, I’m here now, you know,” said Seed o’ Valour consolingly. “I had a long time to wait on that wall though, till a Bumble Bee came lumbering up from the garden. He had got himself dusted all over with pollen out of a white lily, as it was; but a Bee never knows when he has had enough, and the moment he saw the Snapdragon on the wall, he buzzed straight at it. I followed him. He prized open the tight, red jaws of that Snapdragon, and began to thrust himself inside. I flew up and lit on the great lower lip beside him.”

“How dreadfully dangerous!” murmured Breath o’ Clover.

“While the Bee was there,” Seed o’ Valour explained, “he couldn’t shut his mouth; so I stood and looked down his long white throat. But all of a sudden the Bee let himself out before I expected it, the Dragon head gave an awful snap and, I——” He paused.

“Oh, what!” whispered Breath o’ Clover, awe-stricken.

“I fell straight down his throat,” said Seed o’ Valour, with the freezing calm of a warrior.

Dear little Breath o' Clover nearly dropped from her seat.

"Did you, oh, *did* you ever get out again?" she implored.

But Rose Red went elsewhere. Instead of wanting to hear the end of this thrilling adventure, he felt a great desire to get some little Fairy to come and listen to *him* while the moon was shining. He left the bracken, and searched about the silver feet of the birch-trees; he wandered off through a perfect forest of Meadowsweet, where showers of loose, white petals fell down upon him; and just as he came out on the edge of the dewy grass again, he found a little Fairy alone.

She was kneeling down, her face was hidden, and he heard her laugh softly to herself. For a tiny red Ladybird was lying on its back there before her, perfectly helpless, with its little black legs struggling in the air; and the creature was too proud to ask any one to turn it over, though it well knew it could never find its own legs without help, and might have to pass the rest of its life in that painfully false position. The little Fairy laughed again, and then she turned the Ladybird over gently. It pretended not to see her, but immediately began to climb up a tall, feathering grass; and when it reached the top, with great deliberation

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it unsheathed first one wing and then the other, and was gone.

“I should think it would lose its way at night,” Rose Red observed.

The little Fairy did not answer.

“I wish you would come and talk to me,” he said next.

She stretched out a hand to him, and they flew together to a hollow under the bank—a place soft with green moss, and shaded by a delicate fern. There they sat down and looked at each other.

“Why, you are the stranger, the English Elf!” she said, and at once her face grew kind.

“I am Rose Red,” he replied. “And you?”

“Tell me how you came to Ireland,” she asked.

So he told her, not at all unwilling; and then he told her other things, and yet others, this silent Elf, and the Irish Fairy bent her head to listen.

“Are you glad you came to Ireland?” she asked him soon.

But that made him silent, for he remembered, indeed, how cast down he had been that morning, when Trefoil told him that he had come to a country where time was plenty, and sense was scarce.

“Never mind!” said the Irish Fairy, who was quick of comprehension. “Is it lonely, perhaps?—but you’ll



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find friends soon among the Roses. There are numbers of your name here : Roses Red and Roses White, Roses Pink and Roses Pale—all kinds of Roses. Come with me, and we can find them with the Honeysuckle Fairies on the Ring.”

But Rose Red did not stir.

“I can find them to-morrow,” he said. “I will stay with you while the moon shines. Tell me your own name, not theirs.”

“If you can’t tell my name for yourself,” said the Fairy, “you will never know it. And I must fly away, though I am ready to stay with you. Tell my name if you can—or try!”

So he tried. The little Fairy had risen as if to go ; she stood for a moment leaning against a frond of the delicate fern, which looked like frosted silver between its own dew and the moonlight. Rose Red gazed into her face, which was turned towards him with a steady, friendly look. Her eyes were the very bluest, kindest he had ever seen—bluer than the sea, kinder than the sky. He suddenly remembered how she had helped the foolish little Ladybird ; without a minute’s thought, he cried—
“Speedwell.”

“I am Speedwell,” said the Fairy, and, smiling, she came over to him again.

“Perhaps I shall bring you good luck,” she said, “since you are brave. Have you any wish?”

“Not to-night,” said the English Elf.

Speedwell looked half-regretful.

“This would have been the good moment, and I cannot ask again,” she murmured to herself. But to him she said aloud: “Happy are they that have no wishes!”

“Are you one of those that can grant wishes?” said Rose Red.

“Sometimes,” said the Fairy slowly.

“When? Tell me when?” he asked.

“When one that wishes is brave, when I that hear him have no wish of my own then, only then I can. Ask no other question.”

“Only this,” said Rose Red eagerly, “have you no wish now?”

There was no answer.

“Have you none?—none?” he cried aloud.

The little silvery fern shook and dripped at his voice; the Fairy had vanished.

“Speedwell! Speedwell!” called the Elf, and he darted out into the moonlight. It was all lonely, bright, and empty there. “Speedwell!”

He flew far afield, and searched and wandered along

the stream, between sleeping flowers and twinkling grasses, and groves of the sweet-scented fern of Altaneigh ; but he found no Speedwell there. He knew he should not find her now, and yet he could not help looking. He knew, because it was plain, that she had some of those higher powers which he had never won ; therefore, if she chose to be invisible, it was hopeless to seek her, and chiefly because she was there all the time.

At last he wandered back to the Fairy Ring.

CHAPTER VI.

UP AND DOWN.

THE mid-day sun was hot—as hot as it ever is in Ireland. The upper glen lay in a mist of heat, the dark old wood looked like a shadow on the side of the hill ; the river almost slept.

Over the fields of green oats the warm air quivered in waving lines ; there was not a breath to stir the grain, or show for an instant how many dark-blue cornflowers were hidden in that rustling sea. Along its edge the poppies burnt in rows. Their thin, silk petals floated out on the air, as though it were water ; they were light as flames. It was shady only under the elder-trees. Those crooked, old, hollow-hearted things were clothed in cool, thick green, and covered with great creamy flowers like full moons. An elder is never too old to flower.

But the glen was altogether too hot for the Fairies at

this hour. They had retreated—all who were not asleep—up the hill-sides and among the hazels by the stream. In one place, where a great deal of moss lay at the roots of an old hazel, a number of Fairies had laid themselves down to sleep.

The noise of a waterfall above sounded through their dreams ; its white spray came over the air like a mist, and cooled everything near. So the Fairies dreamt of summer rain, and music, and the colours of the rainbow. They woke refreshed, and folded back their wings ;¹ then they began to talk.

The first part of their conversation is, from its simplicity, too difficult to be recorded. It may have concerned the notes of a thrush, or the white strawberry blossoms, or the doings of tiny fishes in the burn, or any other standing mystery. But at last they fell upon the subject of the English Elf, and here we have a chance to follow them.

“I was with him yesterday,” said one, in a slightly irritable voice. “He wanted to know such a quantity of things, and half of them were things I didn’t know myself ! It’s tiring to have to invent reasons for a good hour on end, I can tell you.”

¹ A Fairy does not, as some scientific men have vainly supposed, put his head under his wing, like a bird. He *puts his wings over his head* ; and to this rule there is no exception.

"Was he grateful?" asked a Fairy curiously.

"Not a bit. He said I must be wrong half a dozen times, and he wanted to show me why."

"That's just it!" said the curious Fairy, sitting up suddenly. "He always wants to know the reason why. I never met with such a reasonable being before. It's not natural, and I say it shows he must be mad."

"Perhaps it's only a habit," suggested Goldspeck.

"No, it's *him!*" said Broom decidedly. "He's savage about reasons. You can't give him enough of them, and you can't get them good enough when you do!"

"That's perfectly true," sighed Whim, the Fairy who had exhausted himself with inventing reasons the day before.

"And it's no good to tell him that you do a thing just for fun either. He doesn't count that a reason," continued Broom, who seemed to have been studying the English Elf rather closely. "He asks, 'What's the sense of it?'"

"Why, the fun of it *is* the sense of it, of course," the others rejoined readily.

"Yes, to us; but not to him. He's different, don't you see? He's not so clever as some of you, but he's *dreadfully* intelligent."

“Is that why he doesn’t understand us?” asked innocent little Goldspeck.

“That’s why,” Broom declared seriously. “And there’s another thing—there’s the country he came from.”

“What about that, Broom?” they asked.

“Is there one of you here that knows the first thing at all about England?” Broom inquired.

After a pause—

“I know it’s not in Ireland,” one Fairy ventured.

And encouraged by this—

“It’s a very out-of-the-way place, somewhere behind us there,” said another, with a careless wave of his hand in no particular direction.

“I’m thinking I’d better go to the Swallows for news of it,” said Broom reflectively. “I wouldn’t like to ask the English Elf too much about it, for I’ve a notion that it’s a bad country out and out!”

“How’s that?” said a sleepy voice, belonging to a Fairy only half-awakened.

“If you take notice of the English Elf,” Broom explained, “you’ll find he’s always thinking of improving something. The habit must have grown on him in his own country, and as I take it, because the place is so bad they must always be thinking what they can do to

improve it. Now we that have a whole soft, green island to ourselves, fit for Fairies to live in, what do we do with it?"

"Let it be, and good luck to it!" half a dozen voices answered.

"Very well, then; don't you see what's the matter with him? He can't believe that this country doesn't want improving like his own, that's all!"

And Broom, having spoken his mind, sank back into his little mossy nest, and pulled the fringes of it about to make a pillow for his head. But Whim began to laugh.

"I'll tell you one of the things he wanted to know the reason of yesterday," he said. "Why did so many of the Fairies here have names with o' in them? He couldn't understand it. Seed o' Valour, and Spark o' Dew, and Breath o' Clover, and Fleck o' Foam, and the rest; they bothered him entirely. Why couldn't they be called Foam-flake, and Clover-scent, and——"

"If he has anything to propose about my name, I hope he'll come and tell me what it is!" cried a fierce little Fairy called Peep o' Day, starting up in his place. "If he thinks he can call me Day-light, I'll show him an excellent good reason why he can't."

And Peep o' Day got quite angry. All the Fairies present who had o' in their names sympathised strongly ; but those who had not, laughed.

"Oh, he meant no harm," said Whim. "It's all this rage for improvement that he can't resist ; and of course our country doesn't offer the field for improvement that his own does."

"I believe you're all wrong about that," said Trefoil, who had not yet spoken. "By what I know, England can't be the hopeless sort of place you make out. And it's not the craze for improvement that bothers the English Elf half so much as his own ridiculous energy. I don't pretend to know what he's made of, but it must be of something that never wears out. I never saw such energy in any Fairy frame. Why, a midge on a warm evening is a fool to him !"

"Where does he get it from at all?" murmured a wondering sprite, gazing down on his own outstretched limbs.

"No matter, he has it !" Trefoil affirmed. "And once it's *on* him, you might as well say 'be asy!' to a Swallow swooping on a fly as to him. I know, for I've tried," he added quaintly.

"Well, that's too like a Bee to suit this company," said one.

“He’s just the moral of a Bee, barring the buzz,” another scornfully agreed.

“You’re wrong,” said Trefoil calmly. “He’s the moral of a soldier, all the Foxglove Fairies say.”

“Then they may keep him to fight with, and welcome! I wouldn’t take him to live with for anything you could name,” said the scornful Fairy, with perfect sincerity.

“And you don’t believe England could be a place fit for a Fairy to live in, either? Well, just listen to this, and, mind you, I learnt it from the English Elf.” Trefoil began to sing softly—

“Where the bee sucks, there suck I :
In a cowslip’s bell I lie ;
There I couch when owls do cry.
On the bat’s back I do fly
After summer, merrily.
Merrily, merrily shall I live now,
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.”

The Fairies listened, motionless and charmed. The scornful fay drew himself up till his elbows rested on the ground, and his chin on his hands ; he was breathless with pleasure.

“Sing it again, Trefoil !” he murmured.

Trefoil sang it again, and a number of voices chimed in with—

“Merrily, merrily shall I live now,
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.”

“Whose song is that?” they all wanted to know.

The English Elf said it was the song of a sprite called Ariel, and a great magician in England made it for him long ago—or else the sprite had made it for the magician. He wasn't quite clear about that, and he didn't seem to know how the song had become impressed on his mind either.

“Made it in England?” they questioned doubtfully.

“Yes, in England,” Trefoil repeated firmly.

The scornful little fay sank back in his place.

“We never made one like it,” he whispered, almost sadly—“never one half so sweet. Now I believe in England.”

“So do I,” said a cheerful sprite, rocking himself where he sat. “You see they have two of the best things in the world there—cowslips and lime-blossom.”

“How do you know about the lime-blossom?” demanded Broom.

“Isn't that ‘the blossom that hangs on the bough’?” said the cheerful sprite.

And the others agreed with him that it was.

* * * * *

But the English Elf all this time was wandering about alone, and very lonely he felt. He was by nature rather a solitary sprite ; but it is one thing to be alone when you like it, and quite another thing when you can't help it. There were so many Fairies in this country, so many, and all strange to him.

The longer he stayed with them, the less he understood them. It was not for want of trying ; he might, indeed, have understood them better if he had tried less. He was constantly demanding explanations from them, and the explanations he received were sometimes wild and sometimes witty, but they all had one point in common—they explained nothing. More often they threw a fresh perplexity over the subject under examination. Explanation was not the Irish Fairies' forte. They had a way of expecting things to be understood without words being spent on them, which answered admirably among themselves, but was apt to leave the foreigner deeply bewildered. When Rose Red was bewildered, he grew serious, and then they fled from him. It made no difference. He sat down, and pondered alone over their deficiencies—for of course he knew it was their

deficiencies which prevented them from coming within the range of his understanding.

Their conduct was so variable that it forced him to change his mind about them from day to day, which he much disliked doing ; for his usual habit was to make up his mind *once*, and keep it fixed in that position.

His first opinion was that the Irish Fairies were a thoroughly warlike race ; this was after his experience in the Foxglove Camp. His next opinion was that they were half gay, half dreamy, and wholly unpractical ; this was after his experience under the midsummer moon. Very little later he declared to himself that they were all hopelessly childish, but almost immediately there occurred to his well-trained mind instances of such remarkable cleverness in the Irish sprites, that he concluded their playfulness to be a blind, and their real natures deeply designing. What the character of their designs might be he could never quite determine, but of their existence he had no doubt whatever.

It was not conceivable to him that any race of people should live on no plan at all, but simply from day to day. For his own part he was always making plans, and he was kind enough to make several for his thoughtless Irish friends, who received them blandly, but took no action at all upon them. When he criticised their ways and

doings they were not annoyed, they were only deeply uninterested, and they never defended themselves except by a joke. At first he thought this a sign of conviction on their part, and he was gratified. But too soon he regarded it as a sign of indifference, and he was exasperated.

Had he known that the Irish Fairies were kindly bearing with him as a stranger, and excusing his craze for improvement in consideration of the dreadful country he had left, he would have been shocked. But then it never occurred to Rose Red that he could possibly be an object of toleration, instead of envy. He was not a conceited Fairy, but he was profoundly convinced that he was the representative of a superior race, and that the fact must be apparent to all who met him. The demeanour of the Irish Fairies mystified him. He perceived at last that they were unimpressed by his sovereignty of race, and this indifference of theirs puzzled him at first, then troubled him. He went about in a sort of disconcerted sadness, which made him rather less sympathetic than before, for when the English Elf was sad, he became twice as uncompromising. He saw the faults in the general system of Irish Fairyland with still clearer vision, and stated them with dreadful distinctness.

If any fay would have started up and contradicted him

flatly, it would have been a relief to his mind. But, no—he was not contradicted. These Irish fays had a kind of careless suavity, which his strictest candour failed to ruffle. They smiled in his face; not defiantly, but in scrutably. They shrugged their shoulders a little. One of them suggested that the sun had been a trifle hot, and Rose Red had been flying about too much, perhaps? This was their view of the subject.

It drove the English Elf into dull despair. And really, his case was a hard one, for if you tell people of their deficiencies in the plainest manner and they refuse to be excited against you, what remains to be done? The reformer's occupation is gone.

Rose Red in his extremity bethought himself of Seed o' Valour, and went in search of him to the Foxglove Camp. That fiery little warrior would not listen, he trusted, quite without emotion to remarks upon the spirit of his nation from a foreigner.

He found Seed o' Valour without any difficulty, but before he could deliver himself of the stinging truths he came to impart, Seed o' Valour burst forth into an irresistible demand for sympathy. A soldier's life was very hard to live, he declared, when you could get no fighting for love or honey.

“Since the day you were here yourself, Rose Red,

when I missed all the fun and you got all the fighting," said Seed o' Valour, plaintively; "there might be no such things as Bees in the land of the living, for all we have seen of them! I don't know who would have the courage to take up arms at all, if he knew how many hours of his life he'd have to spend on watch, with nothing to do but to sleep himself stupid in a Foxglove bell."

Rose Red said nothing, for he was not in a sympathetic frame of mind. Seed o' Valour's plaintive voice took on a persuasive tone.

"I think you were born for a soldier, Rose Red," he said. "You made a great stand that day in the bell by yourself. Bad luck to me for an *omadhaun* that I wasn't with you to see the work! Do you remember it?"

"Oh, I remember," said Rose Red, who was a little mollified in spite of himself. It was pleasant to recollect that on one occasion at least he had made an impression on the Irish Fairies. How they had fêted him by moonlight afterwards! And the sweet Speedwell had said—

"A jewel of a soldier! and it's what you were meant for," continued Seed o' Valour, who had thrown himself down carelessly on a bed of wild thyme. He kept his bright eyes fixed on the moody face of the English Elf, who stood beside him motionless with folded arms.

“If you’d only enter the service, we needn’t be wasting away here, day and night, waiting for an enemy that hasn’t the grace to know when he’s wanted. I’m sick of being on the defensive. Join us, Rose Red, only join, and we’ll open war on the Bats at night, whenever the Bees fail us in the day. You *must* have some notion of the tactics your people used long ago. Didn’t you tell me that yourself now?”

“*No!*” shouted Rose Red, clapping his hands to his ears; “I won’t be made a fool of if I have to die of this idleness. I told you I knew nothing about it, and I don’t.”

“But sure, I knew you were only shamming then” said Seed o’ Valour, with a sweet, insinuating smile, as he stretched out an arm through the thyme to catch Rose Red by the ankle, and prevent his escape.

Rose Red leaped into the air, beat his wings together with impatience, and darted off.

Seed o’ Valour rose on his elbow and looked after him, but made no movement to follow. He let his head sink back again, until the thyme closed over it, and he breathed perfumed air.

“He’ll come back again. He thinks he’ll find a bigger race of Fairy soldiers, or maybe better trained to night service, and then he’d be willing to lead them against

the Bats, and show them what he knows. But he won't find them, and then he'll come back to us. Oh, but he's a playboy, that Elf!"

These were the reflections of the enthusiastic warrior, lying on his bed of thyme.

But Rose Red flew on through the sweet summer air in a most unenviable frame of mind. His hopes were gone and his temper was following them. When he thought of Seed o' Valour and his impracticable plans, he grew wild with impatience. If he had only been fortunate enough to meet with some little difficulty or danger that morning, he would have been soothed and gratified into a different being. But all things were idly smooth and sunny, and the course of events refused to be ruffled to suit the necessity of a strange, foreign Fairy, who was slowly consuming with suppressed energy, and the want of an object to expend it upon. It's a dreadful thing to be afflicted in this way when the weather is hot.

But no one can fly for ever, and at last even Rose Red sank his proud little wings, and deposited himself in a place of coolness. He was now high up on the hillside, where, close to a forest of bracken, there grew a little clump of sweet Woodruff. He crept in there, and laid himself down. The scent of the small white flowers cooled and contented him; but when he turned another

way, where round, scarlet Pimpernels were blazing open-eyed in the sun, their brilliance vexed him, and he grew hot and angry again. Fairies are very strongly influenced by the colours and scents of flowers. Some make them hot and some make them cool, some give them courage and some keep them merry. The breath of certain flowers is full of energy, and the breath of others is full of sleep.

The Poppy Fairies, for instance, are almost always asleep; their life is only a succession of many-coloured dreams. If they wake at all it is on a night of wet drenching dews. Then they may open their heavy dark eyes a moment, and see each other, and wonder. But they do not know that they have wakened up, they think it is only another dream, and before they have time to understand, their eyes close softly, their heads sink back, and they are sleeping in the Poppy flowers again.

The other Fairies are a little afraid of them, and very sorry for them too. They come sometimes and peep over the rims of the flowers, to see the Poppy Fairies asleep, wrapped in their flame-coloured garments, and the other Fairies wonder at their still white faces, and their black hair folded back to make pillows for their heads. They would like to whisper something into the ears of the sleeping ones, to make the long lashes lift from

their cheeks, and to see a smile move their closed red lips apart. But they are afraid to wake them, and soon they have to steal away softly, when the Poppy charm begins to make their own eyes heavy, and their limbs dull with sleep.

The English Elf was taken one day to see some of these prisoners sleep-fast in the flowers. He observed that it was incomprehensible to him how any sane beings could give themselves up to a Power which could not be really irresistible. Sleep itself, he said, was only a kind of weakness, a cessation of power; and what difficulty could there be in resisting a weakness?

He said no more at that time, for his head nodded forward, his knees gave way, and the Fairies who had brought him there dragged him hastily away from the spot, supporting him one under each arm. But Rose Red often afterwards alluded to a fatal weakness of will which he had observed to be characteristic of all Fairies of the Irish nation. They were too susceptible, he said, too easily influenced, and led on. He had never seen Fairies so easily influenced.

And this made it the more strange that he had never been able to influence them himself. The more he tried to lead them in the way he considered best, the more they inclined to the opposite direction. He never seemed



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able to account for this at all ; but he sometimes said in his large way, that weak-minded Fairies were usually wrong-minded too.

On this particular afternoon, however, the English Elf was not theorising on his Irish friends, as he lay among the white Woodruff. He was thinking over his own personal perplexities. Though he grew calmer as he grew cooler, he could not quite forget his aggravation at having nothing to do, to undo, or to reform. It was this which kept him awake, in spite of the soft air, the scent, and the sunshine.

CHAPTER VII.

AWAY!

SOMETHING dropped on the ground, and a discontented buzzing arose on the air. Rose Red expected it to pass quickly, or at least to wander from place to place; but it droned steadily on, and at last curiosity made him creep out of his nest to see what was the matter.

“It must be a Bee,” he said; and so it was.

A great, heavy Bee had dropped there, exhausted by the weight of a huge load of honey, and embarrassed besides by having flown right into a Spider's web, and got a quantity of woolly cobweb wound about its wings. The Bee was now in an awkward position, for its wings were too much hampered with cobweb to lift its body, and its legs were too heavy with honey to clear its wings; so it lay helpless, and buzzed loudly for assistance.

Rose Red saw at once that the Bee had attempted to carry a double load, and he began to point out the folly of this proceeding with his usual sound sense.

“If you’ll help me to clear my wings,” said the Bee, “you can say all that while you’re doing it, and waste less time.”

Rose Red was delighted with the remark. It was the first time since his arrival in Ireland that he had heard any living creature allude to the value of time. He felt the bond of sympathy at once, and cheerfully pulled up some spikes of moss to rub the Bee’s wings with. But just as he was beginning, the recollection of his last encounter with a Bee came over him; it was on that occasion when he was left alone in Seed o’ Valour’s Foxglove bell; and he dropped the grass and walked round in front of the insect’s eyes.

“Look! do you by any chance recognise me?” he asked.

“I never saw you in my life before,” said the Bee, without taking the trouble to examine him. “But go on, don’t let that prevent you.”

“No, I was going on to say——”

“I mean, go on rubbing my wings,” the Bee interrupted.

“I can do both, if necessary,” said Rose Red calmly,

picking up the moss. "But I wish to ask first, where did you get that honey?"

"Over Carnamore," said the Bee, impatiently.

"Ah, Carnamore," Rose Red repeated, brushing away at the cobweb. "If you had got it at the Foxglove Camp, I should have requested you to carry it no further, you know."

"You're not a Foxglove Fairy, as far as I can see," said the Bee; "and if you were——" He said no more, for fear Rose Red should decline to give him any further assistance.

"I should like to ask why you don't let the Foxgloves alone, for good and all?" Rose Red inquired, with his usual thirst for information strong upon him. "Isn't Heather the best honey-flower? and these hill-tops are covered with Heather."

"We go to the heather every day. Our honey is nearly all Heather-honey," the Bee declared, with pardonable pride. "But we can't neglect the other flowers entirely. If we did, the consequences for them would be worse than for us." He was now on his own subject and talked almost with readiness.

"The Foxgloves wouldn't mind if you neglected them a bit," hinted the English Elf; and that remark showed how little he understood the Foxglove Fairies.

“They are ignorant,” said the Bee loftily, but without resentment. “All creatures are ignorant who do as they please. Now *we*——”

“Are wise?” suggested Rose Red.

“We are workers, at least,” said the Bee. “We live under discipline, and we have an organised Government.”

“The Fairies say you never enjoy anything,” said Rose Red. “Is it the organised Government that prevents you? It might be reformed, you know.”

The Bee was silent from bewilderment. He would as soon have thought of reforming the course of the sun, as of reforming the government of Bees. He began to think this strange Fairy was rather profane. But he saw no reason why profane hands should not clear the cobweb from his wings, so he remained quiet, while Rose Red brushed away.

“Don’t you think that you could dispense with visiting the Foxglove bells for honey?” the Elf inquired suddenly, seized with an idea that it would be a great thing if he, a foreigner, could bring about a truce between those hereditary foes, the Bees and the Foxglove Fairies. But—

“Certainly not,” the Bee replied, with most discouraging decision.

He was now so far free that he could work one wing a little, and shift his feet about. But Rose Red was not in a hurry to release the other wing.

“I think I can show you that it would be much to your advantage,” he began, “to compromise——”

But the Bee made a violent effort to leave the ground, rose a little way, and came down again with a thud, his legs in the air. It was extraordinary how he contrived in any position to keep safe every grain of his precious load. Rose Red, being a good-natured Elf, sympathised with his desperate hurry to be at work again. He also reflected that this Bee was not in any case a very promising subject for diplomacy.

“I think you’ll find yourself able to fly now,” he said, removing the last shred of cobweb from the Bee’s left wing. “Don’t let me detain you if you are anxious to go.”

The Bee had not the least intention of letting himself be detained. He was an insect with one idea, and had no time to spare. His good-bye, if he said it, was lost in the buzz of departure.

Rose Red stood watching him down the hill, and before the Bee was out of sight, for he flew slowly and heavily with his double load, the English Elf was revolving a new idea in that active brain of his. It made him shake his

head a good deal, and for a short time he wore a look of compunction ; but this was lost in the pleasure of taking a firm resolution. There was nothing in the world the English Elf enjoyed more than taking a resolution, unless indeed it were acting upon it ; and when he might reasonably expect a good deal of opposition to his action. That added the last charm to the situation. Of course he went back no more to his green nest in the Woodruff.

“I must find Trefoil,” he said.

And he opened his wings and flew down the hill, as the Bee had flown before him.

Trefoil had really no concern at all in the matter, but the English Elf had a liking for Trefoil, and the way he showed his liking was to tell him of all the faults and failings he observed in the general Irish constitution of things, and to hold Trefoil responsible for them. Responsibility sat easily on that green Fairy, however. He did not make light of the Elf's complaints ; he received them all with a grave and sympathetic face, while he was thinking of something else. He said,

“Isn't it a pity now?” Or,

“Sure, what can we do at all?”

with so much feeling in his voice that the Elf was convinced he had a spark of the true reforming spirit some-

where in the depths of his nature. He intended to do his very best to kindle that spark.

But it rather interfered with his plans that he could not find Trefoil anywhere on this particular afternoon. He searched through most of their familiar haunts, in places where the shadows fell from the old thorn-trees, and stretched along the grass ; in places where flag-lilies grew beside the running water, and butterflies flickered up and down the deep meadow beyond, among the blue and crimson flowers. He searched a particular slope on the uplands, where rocks lay tumbled together, and bright yellow flowers clung to them, and the larks had a fancy for singing just overhead. It was a particular resort of Trefoil's, and when Rose Red could not find him there, he gave up the search.

"I suppose he's sleeping somewhere," he said, with all the impatience which a waking Fairy is entitled to feel for a sleeping one. "I had better go at once to headquarters."

So he flew directly to the Foxglove Camp, and for the second time that day presented himself before Seed o' Valour.

That ingenious warrior was seated on the ground, engaged in plaiting himself a sword-belt out of white bog-cotton. He had a large pile of the material stowed under

a hollow stone to keep it from blowing away. From this he selected the silky strands with great care, choosing always those that had the most silvery gloss on them; and if a single one broke in the plaiting, he threw them all away. He explained his reasons to his friend the Fieldmouse, who was sitting by watching him.

"I remember," he said, "that a great Fairy sage once laid it down as an axiom that 'no plait is stronger than its weakest strand.' Now I am working on that principle, for I always act on principle when I have no practice to guide me."

The little Fieldmouse was charmed with this wisdom, and was eager to assist him by holding the end of the plait between her teeth. It proved a hindrance to conversation, but her dark, expressive eyes said as much as she wanted at any time. Only when Rose Red appeared suddenly on the scene she darted away immediately, being the shyest of creatures; and Seed o' Valour of course darted after her, for the sword-belt still united them.

"You must excuse me a moment," he called back to Rose Red. And in the politest manner he escorted the Fieldmouse back to her hole, into which she disappeared in her sudden agitated fashion, even while he stood inviting her to come back next day, that he might make a silken white collar to fit her neck.

“She must have been really frightened,” he said to Rose Red, “or she would have listened to that.”

“Very likely,” said Rose Red, without paying the smallest attention to the incident. “I have come back to speak to you, Seed o’ Valour, on a matter of some importance.”

“Do you know I had a kind of notion that you would, all along?” said Seed o’ Valour, laying his head on one side, while his eyes twinkled hopefully. It was all he could do not to shout out “Bats!”

“As we were together on that last field-day with the Bees, and I had the shelter of your bell——”

“While it lasted!”

“I wish to inform you, before any other Fairy, that my views are changed.”

“Which of them?” asked Seed o’ Valour, anxiously.

“I had some conversation with a Bee this morning,” the English Elf proceeded, “and by what he said to me, I am convinced that the Bees are not really enemies of the Foxglove Fairies. For a long time they have been opposed to you very strongly; but that was simply through force of circumstances, and owing to your own misconception of their motives. If you could but believe it, your interests are identical.”

He paused after saying this, for it struck him as a

really luminous exposition of the case, and he wanted to observe its effect on Seed o' Valour. But that intelligent Fairy only gasped.

"You see, you have no use for the honey in your bells. Why not let the Bees come and take it whenever they like?" said Rose Red, as calmly as though he were not proposing to revolutionize the order of centuries.

"Mother o' fortune!" was Seed o' Valour's reply. "Didn't I tell you what would happen if you went on flying about in the sun the way you have been doing, and neglecting your sleep? You're touched in the head, fay!—you're sunstruck!"

The English Elf started back, and glared at Seed o' Valour as if he could have slain him on the spot. But he met such a look of lamenting pity that his rage was turned to wonder, and he stood irresolute.

"The last fay I remember taken like yourself was Harebell," said the Irish Elf pathetically. "He was so left to himself that he wanted to—never mind! I wouldn't let him, and he got over it. Here—I'll tell you what to do. Keep your head cool, and stand out in the rain as much as you can, and perhaps you'll get over it too. Who knows?"

It was impossible to be angry with Seed o' Valour. Rose Red looked at him, and magnanimously forgave him.

“Take me before your Commander-in-Chief now, Seed o’ Valour, and we’ll talk about my cure by and by,” said the English Elf firmly.

“I don’t want to cross your wishes at all,” said Seed o’ Valour, reluctantly. “I’ll take you whenever you like. But don’t be saying rash things about Bees and Foxgloves now, before the Commander-in-Chief, or he’ll put you under arrest as sure as I’m a two-winged Fairy!”

After this, of course nothing would have prevented the English Elf from getting the audience he wanted; and they flew off together to the south side of the Camp, to find out whether His Honour would receive them.

His Honour the Commander-in-Chief of the Foxglove Fairies, had left his tent, and retired to a shady hollow under the bank below, where he was giving audience to a couple of his most distinguished officers. They had just exhibited to him a new and simple device of their own invention for firing furze-seeds out of a split stalk; and they had illustrated its value by triumphantly flooring a young Frog, who had ventured out of his native ditch into the neighbourhood of His Honour’s audience hall.

Rose Red arrived in time to hear the Commander-in-Chief express his gratification at the prompt effect of this artillery upon the Frog. But he inquired whether it could be directed with equal force from a Foxglove bell

opening *downwards* upon an enemy whose descent was almost invariably from *above*?

“Quite impossible,” said the officers.

“Then,” said His Honour, “I must defer the adoption of your invention as part of our recognised equipment until you have remedied that trifling defect in its usefulness. I have no doubt that you will very quickly find means to do so. Accept my congratulations on the ingenuity of your device.”

The officers saluted, and withdrew, carrying their artillery with them. His Honour then relaxed something of the martial stiffness of his attitude, took off the plumed cap which he wore—the only outward sign of his rank—and handed it to a soldier behind him; then seated himself in the middle of a tuft of Woodsorrel, and yawned.

“The worst of these clever, mechanical fellows is, that you have to talk to them in a proper official strain, or they would think you wanting in respect for your subordinates. I can’t keep it up for a whole afternoon, you know, so I hope no one is going to think himself insulted, in consequence.”

These remarks were supposed to be spoken aside to His Honour’s most intimate friend and Second-in-Command, Highflyer. But of course they were heard by every one in the audience-hall, and were properly appreciated.

The English Elf, who, with all his independence of mind had a natural respect for constituted authorities, stepped forward and bowed to the Commander.

His bow was his only introduction, but it was quite sufficient for that experienced officer.

“A stranger?” said His Honour. “Then take precedence of the Fairies present. Let me know your business.”

“I am Rose Red, from England,” said the Elf. “I come to you to propose terms of peace, or at least a truce——”

“But our relations with England are perfectly friendly,” said His Honour.

It was the first time he had heard of England; but of course if the relations between the countries had been otherwise than friendly, he *must* have known it, as he said to himself.

“I did not mean peace with England, but peace between contending parties in this country,” explained the Elf.

There was a silence in the audience-hall, as if the interview had become suddenly interesting.

“And you have been sent,” inquired His Honour, “by——?”

“I am not sent by any one,” said Rose Red. “I am a thoroughly impartial Fairy, and I offer myself as arbitrator of the existing disputes.”

"A thoroughly impartial Fairy!" repeated the Commander-in-Chief meditatively, as though he were pondering this new idea. "As arbitrator——" but he dropped that end of the sentence, for he had no notion what arbitration might be. "Well, I'm entirely obliged to you," he concluded, as the safest and most natural thing to say when a Fairy was plainly "offering" something.

"With your permission I will state the conditions on which I think a perfect understanding may be restored between yourselves and your former allies," said Rose Red.

"What do you mean by our 'former allies'? we have lost none," said the puzzled Commander-in-Chief.

"I mean the Bees," said the English Elf.

This time nobody called him sunstruck. The Commander-in-Chief was too much astonished to say a word, and the other Fairies were too much in awe of the Commander.

But Rose Red, who did not care in the least about producing a sensation, was never very quick to see exactly what sensation he had produced. He fancied this was the silence of unprejudiced attention, and he went on to advance the claims of the Bees, and to condemn the hostilities which the Fairies had practised

against them, in open and undisguised language. Rose Red was not an eloquent being, but the two things which moved him more strongly than any were working in his mind at this moment; injustice to others and opposition to himself. He was not eloquent; his words struck at all the Fairies round like little hard bullets, instead of winding them in soft constraining bands. The Irish Elves were immensely surprised when the bullets began to fly, but they sustained no injuries. They stood one and all behind a defence which served them as well as a rampart of sandbags, and that was their own soft contempt for the attack. As Rose Red grew indignant, they became more interested, and even inclined to cheer him.

“The longer I stay in this country,” he declared sternly, “the less I can understand the purposes of Irish Fairies. They seem to have no aims, to seek no gains, to be employed only in different kinds of idleness. I am told of a race of Fairies here who live in the depths of a wood, and concern themselves with nothing except music. I have met other sprites who assured me personally that their only occupation was to catch the shining black Beetles, sit on their backs, and race them against each other. When I asked them if they had no other aims, they replied that they had only one—to

make the Beetles swifter. Now the Foxglove Fairies seem to have a higher order of intelligence——”

Oddly enough, this was the only remark at which the Commander-in-Chief showed distinct annoyance. One of the Fairies also so far forgot himself as to laugh. Rose Red went on, disregarding—

“But what use do the Foxglove Fairies make of their intelligence? Only to carry on a senseless war of obstruction against the Bees. No one can tell me when this fruitless strife began. No one can tell me of a time when Fairies had any interest in preserving honey against the attacks of industrious Bees. On the contrary it is evident that the honey exists for the benefit of the Bees, as plainly as the flower exists for the benefit of the Fairy. Let us restore things to their natural footing. Make peace with the Bees. Let them visit your bells as often as they desire. For as long as there is a Foxglove standing, be sure the Bees will come to it, whether you permit them or not. And I, for one, am of opinion that they are perfectly right.”

He stopped—because he had no more to say. It has already been remarked that Rose Red was not an orator.

His Honour the Commander-in-Chief rose and stretched out his hand for his plumed cap, because he

would not have chosen to answer even a mad foreigner unceremoniously. But before he could put the cap on his head, a little Fairy scout came flying in, scattered the Elves before him, saluted His Honour, and announced,

“The Bees are over the hill!”

Then he turned and flew for his post; the other Fairies streaming away after him, as if a wind had blown them out.

“Come with me! come on!” cried Seed o’ Valour, catching the English Elf round the neck.

“Hold off! I’m not going with you,” said the Elf.

“You are, but you are,” the Foxglove Fairy insisted, clinging to his former comrade.

“I’ll join the Bees,” said Rose Red.

And they rose in the air together, still struggling, and flew directly against the Commander-in-Chief, who was hurrying away like the rest.

“What’s that? ‘join the Bees?’” said His Honour, sharply. “You’ll not get the chance. Seed o’ Valour, let him go, and fly to your post.”

Seed o’ Valour flew away with a sad little cry for his lost comrade.

“Robin and Redwing!” called the Commander, “take this fay prisoner. Make him fast for the present, and

bring him before me when the attack is over. Set a watch."

His Honour hurried by. The two Fairies called Robin and Redwing seized the English Elf and carried him off. His struggles were short, for they were two to one, and quite determined not to be detained long. Having fastened his hands behind his back, they tied him firmly to the stem of a stiff-growing bracken, and whistled up two black Spiders to watch him. They threatened the Spiders with dire things if they should fail to report the prisoner's least attempt to escape, and then they flew off as fast as their wings could carry them, to join battle with the Bees. Rose Red was left in his seclusion under the bracken, to consider himself.

Truly, he had never been in a worse position, and the more he considered it, the less he could see his way out. He was defenceless, friendless, a prisoner, and in a foreign land. It was so hopeless, so disastrous, that he felt his long-lost dignity return, and his spirit rise to the occasion, as the spirit of an English Elf is wont to do when he finds himself in a scrape serious enough to merit fortitude.

First he tugged at the tight green withes that bound him, only to assure himself that they were too cunningly tied to give way. But his movement had alarmed the two

black Spiders on watch, and they ran at him one from each side with alacrity in all their legs, so that he instantly became quiet again, for fear they should run in another direction and recall the Fairies.

Then the Spiders began consulting, with their dull malignant eyes upon him. They could not get over their natural fear of a Fairy, though they saw him tied and bound *for the present*. Spiders are slaves by nature; they are greedy and cunning, yet their fears are always getting the better of their desires. This pair were like the rest, spiteful but frightened; not too much frightened, however, to recollect that they must propitiate Robin and Redwing, who were free Fairies, at the expense of Rose Red, who was a prisoned Fairy. Accordingly, while one Spider remained below curled up among his legs and keeping watch, the other ran up the bracken stem, and swinging himself downwards from a green frond just over the Elf's head, he commenced to spin a complicated web in the middle of which the Elf very soon found himself like a netted fly, with the Spider's strands stretching out from every part of his person towards the surrounding objects. When he had finished his web, the Spider came down again, and surveyed it with the greatest satisfaction from below. It mattered not at all to his mind that Rose Red, if freed from his other bonds, could have

flown right out of the web with one stroke of his wings. The Fairy *looked* as if he were a prisoner in the mesh, and so the Spider was satisfied.

Strange to say, Rose Red was also proportionately annoyed. He felt the cobweb, light though it was, as a heavy aggravation of his woes. The heroic calm deserted him, and he fell into a rage. It made the Spiders tremble to see him, for they had never been so close to a Fairy in a rage before, and judging by their knowledge of the habits of the race, it seemed unlikely that this Fairy would remain tied to a bracken stem for ever. In the event of his getting loose now, they felt as if all their legs would be insufficient for safety.

There was a stir in the air above—no more than a breath. The grasses shook and waved apart, and the Spiders shrank away from this new-comer. Rose Red lifted his distracted gaze, and there stood the slender Speedwell, gazing at him with her friendly eyes.

“What is this?” she asked.

But he could not answer. He had sought for her, and longed to see her, when he was proud and free. She came when he was wretched and a prisoner, and he turned away his head. It was worse than being conquered that this Fairy maiden should see him conquered.

Perhaps the gentle Speedwell understood it all, for her

wise blue eyes saw into many things, and it may have been because she was content to be helpful without understanding that so many things were clear to her. At present it was quite evident that there was no one to help her unfortunate friend.

She broke into the middle of the web first and pulled it to pieces. That alarmed the black Spiders, and they rolled up at once, and pretended to be dead, which is their great resource in emergencies. Then Speedwell began to untie the knots in the green, thin withes that bound the English Elf, and they gave way one by one. At this sight the Spiders thought it time to breathe again; and before the English Elf was quite free, they had decided that it would be better to live in quite a distant part of the country, and were far on their way there, palpitating. They never again kept watch over other people's prisoners.

But the English Elf and Speedwell were travelling, if the Spiders had only known it, in quite an opposite direction. The instincts of the wise are even more mysterious than the impulses of the foolish, and it would be impossible to say why Speedwell desired to fly with Rose Red as far as possible from the Foxglove Camp, and to bring him to a place within sound of the sea. He followed her without a question. Either his usual

decision of mind had deserted him, or else it had impelled him to leave decisions with Speedwell—a singular conclusion for this independent Elf.

They flew eastwards. There was no wind, and the sun was almost down. It was towards the end of the long summer day when these two silent Fairies dropped from the air to the earth in a place within sound of the sea. The sea-waves were breaking over the rocks down below, and the gray rocks rose everywhere through the grass where they rested; short thick grass shorn by the sea winds, and sprinkled with the flowers that love the sea, with wreaths of silver weed and yellow starry stone-crops, and tufts of sea-pinks wearing their rosy crowns in the face of all the winds that blow. They were all brave flowers, and the English Elf found himself at home in this wild sea-garden.

“Speedwell,” he said, “I looked for you and I never could find you after that night. Are you going to vanish away again in a moment?”

“No,” said the Speedwell; “I shall stay here while you want me. But what have you been doing amongst all the other Fairies?”

“I have disagreed with them all,” said the Elf distinctly.

“It is only that you have misunderstood each other,” said Speedwell.

“That’s impossible,” the Elf replied. “I have explained myself so often and clearly, believe me.”

“I can believe you,” she said; and he wondered why she laughed. “Did *they* ever explain themselves to you, Rose Red?”

“No, I can’t say they did,” said the Elf. “You can’t call it an explanation to say that a thing ‘has always been that way, just;’ or that a thing ‘would be a heap more bother any other way.’ I don’t think your Irish Elves have much idea of the nature of an explanation.”

“I don’t think we have,” said Speedwell, reflectively. “You see, we seldom ask one ourselves. We understand things so much better when they are not explained.”

Pure surprise at this remark prevented the English Elf from asking her at once to explain what it meant. And Speedwell continued,

“You seem to have fallen into some confusion yourself between the Bees and the Foxglove Fairies.”

“Not at all!” said Rose Red promptly. “I thought the Bees were robbers, so I fought for the Foxglove Fairies one day. Then I found that the Bees were honest workers, unjustly hindered by the Fairies. So I wanted to fight for the Bees; but the Fairies made me prisoner,

I'll make them sorry for that trick one day. They shall learn they were wrong."

"Always wrong," smiled the Speedwell.

"And I am right. You know it!" insisted Rose Red.

"Nearly right," sighed the Speedwell.

"Then why are you not pleased with me?" said the blunt English Elf.

"I am thinking what sad trouble you will make in this country, to prove you were right." And Speedwell shook her head sorrowfully, and her blue eyes were clouded.

"I wish I had never come here. I wish I were in England now," said the Elf; and he grew sad himself with longing.

"I can grant your wish," said the blue-eyed Fairy, with her eyes upon him, and she saw him start with joy.

Then she rose, and called into the air, and called again.

There were Swallows in that place by the sea, flying in wild circles after each other, and grazing the ground with their wings. One of these birds, when he heard her voice, turned in the air as only a Swallow can turn, with one tilt of his wings, and dashed down to her feet.

"My Swallow! my Sailor!" said the Speedwell.

“Will you go on a voyage for me before the autumn comes this year? Will you go now?”

“Any time,” said the Swallow, in his short, sweet pipe.

“There is a country of England; I do not know how far away. Will you fly there?”

“Anywhere,” said the Swallow.

“The English Elf must go back to his country, and you must carry him over the sea between your dark-blue wings. Will you do this for me?”

“Anything,” piped the Swallow.

He stooped low, with his soft breast to the ground, and his long wings trailed upon the grass. He was ready.

“Now!” said Speedwell to the English Elf.

He did not hear. He looked towards the land he was leaving, up the green glen lying quiet between its hills, filled with clear sunlight, fairy-haunted. He was going where he would never see them again—the bright, little, tender, merry, vexatious Irish Fairies, whose ways had worried him so!—Trefoil, Seed o’ Valour, Broom, and Robin, and Redwing, Fly-by-Night, and Peep o’ Day.

“Speedwell, let me stay,” he sighed; “only another day.”



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Speedwell pointed eastward. There lay the sea, blue and broad, stretching out to the sky; an empty air between them; no land in sight. But the voice of his country called to him in all the living waves, and his heart went back to England.

One step and he had thrown himself between the Swallow's wings. One stroke of the long wings, and Rose Red was so high in air that he could not see the blue of Speedwell's eyes.

"Speedwell," he called to her, "tell the Fairies—I love them."

And the Swallow darted out across the sea.

THE END.





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